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ORIENTATION TO LITERATURE, BALLADS--ORIENTATION, TRADITIONAL BALLAD, LITERARY BALLAD, BOOK OF BALLADS--LITERATURE CURRICULUM I, TEACHER VERSION.

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PRESENTED HERE WAS A GUIDE FOR TEACHER USE IN A SEVENTH-GRADE LITERATURE CURRICULUM. ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS WHICH INCLUDED EASY, MEDIUM, AND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES WERE DISCUSSED. THE GUIDE CONTAINED A BIBLIOGRAPHY, A LIST OF RECORDINGS SUITABLE FOR PRESENTING UNITS COVERING ORIENTATION TO LITERATURE, TRADITIONAL BALLADS, AND LITERARY BALLADS, AND A BALLAD SUPPLEMENT. AN ACCOMPANYING STUDY GUIDE WAS ALSO PREPARED FOR STUDENT USE (ED 010 135). (WN)

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OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

ORIENTATION TO LITERATURE

BALLADS

Orientation
Traditional Ballad
Literary Ballad
Book of Ballads

Literature Curriculum I
Teacher Version

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

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OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

GENERAL ORIENTATION UNIT

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Teacher Version

GENERAL ORIENTATION UNIT

Introduction.

The General Introduction to the literature curriculum has given at some length a statement of our aims in the literature course and a discussion of the three basic headings of Subject, Form, and Point of View. There is no need for a detailed repetition here.

As a glance at the chart at the end of the General Introduction will show, the seventh grade deals on a very elementary level with these three rubrics. Thus under Subject it is sufficient if the students during this year can be brought to see that there is more to a piece of literature than the narrative -- that a work can mean as well as tell. Inasmuch as this concept is basic to any understanding of any work, and inasmuch as it is most easily comprehended through a study of various forms of narrative, the work of the seventh grade is concerned exclusively with types of narrative: the fable, the parable, they myth, the traditional and literary ballad, and the short story.

Under Form the basic distinction in the seventh grade is that between prose and verse, and, on an elementary level, some of the form-giving characteristics of each --- the arrangement in stanzas of rhymed lines with a highly regular rhythm on the one hand, and the arrangement in paragraphs of unrhymed lines with no apparent rhythm on the other.

Point of View deals with both the technical aspect of the phrase, i.e.,the angle from which the author writes, and the broader implications of the phrase, such as attitude, tone, and effect. But no attempt is made to go too deeply or too formally into the matter.

The General Orientation Unit introduces the students to a wide range of literary expression: narrative poetry, lyric poetry, the essay, and the short story. Because the rest of the year's work deals with types of narrative, it seems best to begin and end the General Orientation Unit with narratives. The unit is representative of the organization and approach of succeeding units and hence should give both the student and the teacher an introduction to the curriculum in literature.

Each selection is followed by questions and activities that are graded "easy," "medium," or "difficult" according to the order of their difficulty. The answers provided for the teacher are seldom the only answers possible, but rather are intended to point in certain directions toward which students might aim their answers or be led to aim their answers. Nor are the questions and exercises intended as straitjackets. You should feel free to improvise and, above all, to bring your own insights to the literature.

I. Narrative Poem. Robert Southey, "Bishop Hatto"

Explication

Drawn from the old story of Bishop Hatto and the Mouse Tower is Robert Southey's narrative poem, "Bishop Hatto." It is a tale of horror yet justice, chosen for its interest to youth--who are, if we are to believe William Golding's Lord of the Flies, naturally somewhat ferocious--and for its clear demonstration of the key principles of Subject, Form, and Point of View.

First, students can clearly see what it is about: the punishment of a cruel man who burned up a barnful of the poor because they would eat up the corn. From this central action they can also see that the poem is also about intangible matters, matters which they cannot actually touch but can sense from the events in the poem: it is about cruelty, fear, and revenge. Thus this poem blends both sense and spirit.

The form, too, follows a perceivable pattern: first is the initial act of locking up the poor in the granary, the "beginning," stanzas 1-7. Second is the Bishop's retreat, following the foreshadowing events of the eaten picture and corn, the "middle," stanzas 8-11. The third part takes place in the tower; in this scene, with the setting enforcing a second death, takes place the revenge of the rats upon the Bishop. This, the denouement, or "end," is in stanzas 12-19.

Point of View is omniscient and generally objective. The events are told with a minimum of moralizing except for the final comment, "For they were sent to do judgment on him." Here the class can puzzle over problems of motivation: why does the Bishop lock up the people in the first place? Does he wish to prevent a more lingering death by starvation--is he "cruel only to be kind"? or does he simply not want them to eat up his own grain? The latter is probably truer, in that the teller reports objectively that he is a merry, innocent sleeper after burning the barn. Then students can begin to see the rats as supernatural agents of justice; some can perhaps see the irony of a man who considered the poor as only so many rats, then is destroyed by that same sort of beast.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. How does the weather play an important part in the poem?--Obviously, the weather has ruined the grain crop, and hunger is upon the land. However, the very unnaturalness of corn's growing in the winter adds to the eeriness of the poem.

2. Why, thus, do the poor gather around the Bishop's door?--The answer is obvious. The Bishop's granaries are well stocked. Not so obvious is the irony implied, for the poor normally would

come to a Bishop for many kinds of succor, both spiritual and physical. It is quite natural that they should turn to him in time of famine; it is most unnatural that Hatto as a bishop or as a human being would refuse help. The Bishop's actions, then, go against nature as much as does the grain's growing in winter.

3. Why does he burn the people up? --We can answer this question on many levels. It would be accurate, for instance, to say that he burns them in order to avoid giving them grain. But obviously the Bishop's act is out of proportion to the request; it springs from his inhumanity. (Remember that he calls the people rats.) The poem contains a liberal element of horror, not the least of which is the method through which the poor are killed.

4. How long does he enjoy his triumph? --He enjoys it for one day. The morning after he has committed his atrocious deed, retribution sets in. (See stanza 8.)

5. This poem tells a story. Can you tell the story in your own words? --The students might be expected to respond something like this: Because there was no grain, the poor people were starving. Knowing that Bishop Hatto had a large supply of grain, the poor went to him and asked him to help them. Instead of supplying them with grain, he burned them up. After he had done this, he slept well, but in the morning he found that rats had eaten a portrait of him and had also eaten all of his grain. He was stricken with terror and decided to save himself by going to his tower on the Rhine. However, even there he was not safe, for the hordes of rats swam the Rhine, invaded the tower, and ate Bishop Hatto.

6. Except for the tenth and the next to the last, all of the stanzas in the poem contain four lines (that is, they are quatrains). How do the stanzas rhyme? Are they all the same? --In the simplest way possible, you should define stanza for the students (e.g., from the New Collegiate Dictionary: "A recurring unit of a poem consisting of a group of verses, or lines, which are combined normally according to a typical scheme. . . ."). You might point out that a stanza is somewhat like a paragraph, a way of dividing the poem into parts. Then the students should see that normally the stanzas in "Bishop Hatto" rhyme AABB. You might go on to point out that this rhyme scheme is an important part of the form of the poem; the reader waits with pleasure for the resolution of the rhyme pattern.

7. As an experiment, sing a few stanzas of the poem to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel." Does the tune always fit the poem exactly? -- This exercise ought to demonstrate to students that, like music, poetry has a "beat." The regularity of the tune and the irregularity of the poem should also be apparent. That is, a poem isn't normally intended to be completely regular, to be read in a monotonously rising and falling pattern, but will conform to the irregularities of the language therein. Most poems have a clearly discernible over-all meter, but few poems are

completely regular. This regularity of rhythm is one of the elementary distinctions between prose and verbs, and as such should be stressed.

8. If this poem were used as the basis for a movie, what kind of movie would it be? Explain in detail. --Unquestionably, the poem is one in which horror is a controlling element. The question is an attempt to lead the student to visualize that horror. Since youngsters--at least according to motion picture industry surverys--are fascinated by the macabre and horrible, they should respond to a poem that capitalizes on those elements. The implication of this question should not be pushed too far; for, after all, comparing the poem to a shoddy movie, as most horror films are, is hardly fair to the poem.

9. Some of the words in this poem may seem strange to you. By using a dictionary, try to determine what these words mean in this poem: appointed (3rd stanza), repair (3rd stanza), tidings (4th stanza), made fast (5th stanza), countenance (9th stanza), loopholes (12th stanza), told (16th stanza--see "tell" in your dictionary), myriads (16th stanza), yore (16th stanza), beads (17th stanza), tell (17th stanza). --This question should give the student exercise in discriminating among the meanings found for a word in the dictionary. For instance, in the sixteenth stanza, "They are not to be told by the dozens or score" has little meaning unless the student knows that "tell" means count as well as convey information orally.

10. On the Rhine, near the city of Mainz, there is a structure called the Mouse Tower. Do you think there is some connection between the Mouse Tower and the poem? --Obviously there is such a connection. Southey is telling one version of the story of the Bishop of Mainz who, according to legend, was eaten alive by rodents. The point here is that literature is often based on history, legend, or personal experience. You might ask the students if they can think of any other words which give an artistic presentation of legend or history. And you might go on to ask them the difference between history or legend and literature, not that literature and legend are always separable.

Medium

11. What kind of man is it that could call the starving people "rats, that only consume the corn"? --Obviously, this question should get the students into the problem of the nature of Bishop Hatto. He is apparently a completely heartless man, inhuman in the sense that he can view his fellow men as rats. If he were capable of humanity, the action of the poem could never transpire. Thus, the poem is not only about Bishop Hatto, but also about a kind of human being who is a menace to the human race. The student should be able to see parallels between Bishop Hatto and Hitler, for instance. Once the student understands the nature of Hatto's character, he will begin to see the import of the poem.

12. What kind of man is it who eats supper merrily and sleeps "like an innocent man" after burning a barnful of innocent people? --Obviously, this question relates closely to the one which precedes it. However, now the discussion should get nearer to the question of conscience and the subsidiary question of ego. Note that the Bishop "tells his beads" when the rats are approaching -- that is, he maintains his "religion" in a sense, or the outward form thereof, but he completely ignores the main injunctions of Christianity. In so doing, he is throughout the poem concerned about his personal salvation and completely uninterested in what happens to anyone else. For this reason, the destruction of his picture as the first hint of his downfall is particularly fitting, as it is fitting that the egocentric Bishop should have a portrait of himself. The possibilities for the exploration of questions eleven and twelve are virtually limitless.

13. What is the first warning that the tide is turning against the Bishop? The second? --This question is closely connected with number twelve. The first hint of the Bishop's downfall is, of course, the destruction of his portrait; the second is the report that the rats had eaten all his corn.

14. What is the first sign that the tower is not the safe retreat that the Bishop thought it would be? --The first actual sign is the screaming of the cat in stanza 14. However, perhaps the student can discover that the destruction of the Bishop's portrait portends his inescapable doom, regardless of the security of the tower. By asking intelligent questions about the form of the poem, the teacher can lead the student to see that Southey included the destruction of the portrait as a foreshadowing of the Bishop's destruction. That is, every element of a work of literature must--or at least should--have meaning, should function as an integral part of the whole. Thus, when the careful reader finds that the portrait has been eaten by rats, he will guess immediately that in some way the rats will destroy the Bishop.

15. What stanzas are the beginning of the story? What stanzas are the middle--the part of the poem where things begin to turn around? The end? --This question should demonstrate to the student that "Bishop Hatto" is developed in fairly well defined parts. That is, it has a clear beginning, middle, and end, and these parts fit together into a well structured and artistically satisfying whole. In general, one might say that the beginning of the poem is contained in stanzas 1 through 5. (containing the narrative of what Hatto did about the starving people's request). The middle is stanzas 6 through 12 (the Bishop's reaction to what he has done and his retreat to the tower). The conclusion is stanzas 13 through 19. We must realize, however, that any division is arbitrary. For instance, the bright student might argue that there are really only two parts to the poem, the rising and the falling action (stanzas 1 through 6 and stanzas 7 through 19). Or perhaps the beginning really should include stanza 6, the middle, stanzas 7 through 15. As long as the student sees that there is a plan

and that there is a situation and a resolution, the question has served its purpose. The less dogmatic we can be about distintions that are basically artificial, the more likely we are to bring about understanding and appreciation.

16. How does the teller of the tale seem to feel about the events? Does he take part in the action or merely report it? Does he ever say definitely how he feels about Bishop Hatto? But do you know? Back up your judgment with proof from the text. --The Point of View of the "teller" toward the events is, at first glance, objective. That is, the poet doesn't -- until perhaps the last line -- say anything specific about the wickedness of what Hatto does. But implicitly, by what he chooses to tell and what to suppress, the author does levy a judgment. For instance, he tells how the Bishop slept like an innocent man after burning the poor. This choice reveals the poet's attitude, as do many others that the student can find in the text. That is, the poet makes choices for material to include in the work, and these choices reveal his point of view toward his subject. In the last line, he definitely states a position when he says that the rats came to do judgment, that is, to give the Bishop his just deserts. As is always the case with third person narration, the teller of the tale does not directly take part in the action.

17. Why do you think Southey told his story in the form of a poem? Would it be more interesting if it were in prose? --The author might well have written his work in prose, but the subject itself is ideally adapted to the needs of a short narrative poem. Within short compass, a great deal can be done in the way of a strong yet simple plot and the development of the Bishop's character. Perhaps the most direct answer to the question of why the author chose verse is that he was a poet, and poets write poetry; they think in terms of poetry. Whether or not the tale would be more interesting in prose is, of course, a moot question. If the student sees that poetry is not a hindrance to communication, but actually at times adds meaning and delight, the question will have served its purpose.

Difficult

18. Who might the rats be? --On the simplest level, the rats are, of course, symbolic of the poor, whom the Bishop called rats. But the question becomes just a bit tricky, for here we are dealing with the relationship of symbol to reality. Were the rats actually the spirits of the starving people come to take revenge and do judgment? One might say so, but that is an oversimplification. In the action of the poem, they are real rats; in the in the meaning of the poem, they are symbolic. At this point, the bright student will encounter a difficulty, for he will discover that the rats are symbolic, and then he will ask himself, "But why symbolize the poor so hideously? Did the poet really think that poor people are rats?" When the student arrives at this point, he will see that the poem is a bit more complex than it

seems at first glance, and the complexity stems from the nature of the rats as symbols.

19. How can the Bishop's death be considered a just one?--One answer is obvious: he called the starving people rats and killed them; in turn, he was killed by rats. Thus, in the literal and in the poetic sense he deserved what happened to him.

20. What would you say is the subject of this poem? Is it only about a man who burns up a barn and is destroyed in return? Or is it about anything else? Could we say that the poem is about things we can touch (towers, cats, rats) and about things we cannot touch, but rather sense (fear, cruelty)?--The answers to this question are countless. Certainly, however, the student should see immediately that the poem is, first, a tale of horror. Beyond that the subject concerns man's inhumanity to man and a view of life which states that sin must be avenged.

21. How do most people feel about rats? Does this feeling have any effect on your reaction to the poem? Would the effect be less if the Bishop were devoured by lions instead of rats? --See the discussion of question 18.

22. Does a religious attitude enter the poem? Explain what that attitude is and justify your answer by referring to the poem. --The Bishop apparently considers himself a perfectly religious man, even though his actions are most un-Christian. When the peril of the rats is upon him, he tells his beads; he sleeps like an innocent man. Perhaps his greatest sin is his failure to perceive his own guilt. You might ask the students whether the Bishop finally has remorse for his actions or if he merely tells his beads in an effort to use the habitual forms of religion to propitiate an angry God.

Further, a religious attitude enters the poem in connection with the supernatural aspect of the sending of the rats. The poem states that "they were sent." The students might be asked who sent them. Clearly the Bishop is powerful enough to be safe from any human agency of justice. This should lead into the next question.

23. How does the saying "He got what was coming to him" apply to the poem? What is the meaning of the term "poetic justice"? Do you see any poetic justice in "Bishop Hatto?"--Poetic justice is a vague term, but in general it means the operation of divine or supernatural retribution in tangible, observable, human terms. If the Bishop had died one could believe he had gone to Hell, but being eaten by rats is the observable operation of abstract justice, and hence more satisfying.

II. Lyric Poem. A. E. Housman, "Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now"

Explication

Certainly one of the most widely read poems in the language, "Loveliest of Trees" serves as an ideal introduction to the lyric. In many ways it is a simple poem: in the first stanza, the poet gives a brief description of blooming cherry trees at Easter; in the second stanza, he tells us that he is twenty and thus has only fifty years before his threescore and ten have elapsed; the third stanza laments the brevity of life--to look at things of beauty, how short a span is fifty years! Structurally the poem is also simple: the first and second stanzas introduce separate ideas; the third stanza unites those ideas.

A. E. Housmen (1859-1936) was greatly preoccupied with the idea of life's brevity; thus, he characteristically reiterated the carpe diem (literally, grasp the day) motif: live, love, enjoy, for the sun of life soon sets. This motif is common in poetry, a theme with countless variations, from that of Andrew Marvell in "To His Coy Mistress" to its most popular embodiment in Edward Fitzgerald's "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám," the perennial undergraduate favorite that celebrates a book of verse, a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and Thou.

The very nature of the carpe diem theme in "Loveliest of Trees" implies a scale of values, indeed, a fundamental question about basic values. To Housman, the beauty of the world is a value in and of itself, to be grasped and enjoyed, to be lamented in its passing.

And yet seldom does the poem with a carpe diem motif celebrate pure paganism, as does the "Rubáiyát." More frequently, as in Housman's poem, it is likely to sidestep the question of eternity and center on man's life in the here and now. In this sense, everyone can share in the post's lament that so much beauty must so soon be lost. Even children, with their tacit faith in their own immortality, must realize that it is the human condition for time to slip rapidly away; and such is the subject of this lyric poem.

Questions and activities

Easy

1. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? Compare it with that of "Bishop Hatto."

2. How many is a score?

3. Explain some of the most important differences between "Loveliest of Trees" and "Bishop Hatto." --The most obvious difference (aside from length, rhyme, meter, etc.) is that "Bishop Hatto" tells a story, while "Loveliest of Trees" doesn't.

There are numerous other differences, for instance, the tones of the poems, their attitudes toward life, etc.

4. Do you think that a man should spend his time writing about cherry trees in bloom? How is the poet's interest in cherry trees different from that of the botanist and the farmer? --This question may lead to the crucial question of whether or no poetry is "sissy stuff." The composition of even a short poem such as "Loveliest of Trees" demands a good deal of intellectual sinew; it is not an exercise for the soft-minded. Furthermore, there is nothing effete about an appreciation of beauty. While the botanist would classify and analyze cherry trees and the farmer would prune them and sell their fruit, the poet would see in them their symbolic, emotional, and intellectual value.

Medium

5. Is there a story to the poem? --Not really. There is a slight narrative element. Apparently the poet first sees cherry trees in bloom and then resolves to walk about so that he can see more of them; that is, there is a discernible chronological sequence of events, but we can hardly call this story.

6. Why does the poet say that the cherry tree is hung with snow? --Obviously because cherry blossoms resemble snow on branches. Using the similarity between snow and the blossoms, the poet has stated his ideas in a metaphor.

7. In your own words, explain what the poem says about how you should live. --One might expect the student to say something like this: the poem says that I should enjoy every minute of life, for I have only a limited amount of time. Naturally, there are countless possibilities for good answers to this question.

8. In the poem, how old does the poet say he is? What season of year does the poem talk about? Is there any relationship between the poet's age and the season discussed inthe poem? Explain. --The poet tells us that of his allotted threescore years and ten, twenty will not come again; thus he is twenty years old. He is in the springtime of life, which constitutes the relationship between the season of the poem and the poet's age. Having learned in "Hatto" what a "score" is, they should be able to do the math in stanza two.

9. Might the cherry tree in the poem "mean" more than just a tree? --This question can be carried just about as far as the teacher chooses. The cherry tree is obviously a symbol of spring. How far the symbolism in the poem is to be pursued is up to the teacher. If the students get interested in symbolism and connotation, something might be done with the significance of "snow," which symbolizes winter in nature and old age (the winter of life when the hair is like snow) in man. Some of the brighter ones might see the interpretation of the poem suggested by this fact--that if a cherry tree can be lovely when hung with snow, so too

old age need not mean a loss of a sense of beauty or of the capacity for its enjoyment. The students might see that in one way the poetized arithmetic of the second stanza is pivotal in implying an unstated proportion. In the first two stanzas we have the young poet and the springtime cherry tree; in the third we have the winter cherry tree; we are invited to supply the missing fourth term of the proportion, old age, and see how it fits into the meaning of the poem.

10. Rewrite the poem in prose. Does it lose anything? What? --A prose rendition of virtually any poem, particularly lyric, leaves it devoid of anything but paraphraseable content; when the "poetic" element is gone, frequently the lyric is a flat and dull truism. Thus: It is Easter and the cherries are blooming; I am twenty and have only about fifty more years to see the cherry trees bloom; that's such a short time that I intend to make the most of every moment. Every student should be able to perceive the difference between the poem and its prose paraphrase. The paraphrase loses melody, poetic form, the flash of insight that constitutes a good poem.

11. "Loveliest of Trees" is one of the most popular poems in the English language. Why do you think it has such broad appeal? --The student should be guided away from generalizations. He should state his reasons specifically. For instance, certainly one of the main reasons for the poem's appeal is that it says something meaningful about the human condition. Another is its tight structure (see the explication preceding the poem). It is highly "listenable" piece of verse, with a lovely melody, and it is simple enough that a great many readers can easily understand it. Great poetry is not necessarily highly complex.

12. Look at the first stanza of the poem. It says that the cherry tree is "wearing white for Eastertide." To what does the poem, in its use of the word "wearing" compare the cherry tree? (Can a tree really "wear" anything?) --The poet here is using personification, a device which it might be well to explain to the students.

13. Is Housman writing about the world of the senses or the world of the mind? In other words, is this poem about an experience, or a man's reaction to it, or both? Would it have been possible to write about one without the other? --Housman is writing about the meaning of a sensory experience. He sees the trees, reacts to them emotionally and intellectually, and sets his reaction down in poetic form. The total experience is an inseparable whole.

14. Discuss the meaning of "Point of View" with your teacher. Do you think it would have made any difference to the poem if it were written from the third person point of view? --This is a fairly difficult question to answer. It is generally conceded that first person is a bit more immediate than third, particularly in poetry, but not necessarily. We can say certainly that third

person would have forced the poet into a more elaborate development, because he would need to explain the nature of the person who was experiencing the blooming cherry trees; if he had not done that, the poem would have lost a good deal of its impact. The student might be expected to answer that the poem would not be as effective in third person, for the poet would not have been speaking about his own reaction, but about someone else's.

Difficult

15. What is the "mood" of the poem? Can you think of some words that describe the mood? --Such words might be "longing," "melancholy," "pensive." The poem is really not sad. The student should see that the mood is a mixture of melancholy at life's brevity and elation in the experience of beauty.

16. Is the poet speaking of what he thinks or of what someone else thinks? How do you know?

17. In the dictionary, look up the meaning of carpe diem. How does this term apply to the poem? --See the explication.

18. Read Shakespeare's sonnet "That Time of Year" in Immortal Poems, p. 62. In what ways does it compare to "Loveliest of Trees?" --In theme, the two poems are similar. The concluding couplet of the sonnet says, "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong, / To love that well which thou must leave ere long." Shakespeare writes from the viewpoint of a man in the twilight of his life, but he arrives at a conclusion similar to Housman's. The sonnet also uses the "tree" symbol.

19. Read "To Celia," by Ben Jonson, in Immortal Poems, p. 79. Is it familiar to you? Where have you heard it? It is also a lyric poem. On the basis of these two poems--and on the basis of your understanding of the word "lyric"--can you give a tentative definition of lyric poetry? (How does the word "lyre" relate to lyric poetry?) --The student might recognize "To Celia" as the lyric for the old song "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes." He should see that a lyric poem is normally melodic and that frequently it is set to music. He might also recognize the distinction between lyric and narrative poetry, that is, lyric poetry does not tell a story. Thus, his tentative definition might run something like this: a lyric is a melodic poem that does not tell a story. You might discuss the nature of the lyric in a bit more detail.

III. Essay. Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), "The Laborious Ant "

Explication

"The Laborious Ant" should appeal to most students. It is in the great tradition of "de-bunking," and should evoke a response from those who are perhaps overfull of a diet of platitudes and old saws. It exploits a device which children themselves use, though unconsciously--the use of hyperbole and exaggeration for comic effect. An essay devoted to exposing the ant--that paragon of providence--as a fool motivated by vanity is a passage which the students should approach with relish.

The essay is included in the Orientation Unit in an attempt to help break down the unconscious assumption that in literary terminology prose means a story. It is also hoped that students will begin to see that the word "essay" does not necessarily mean solemn, serious, and profound discourse.

The students should be led to see that the main purpose of Twain's piece is not narrative, though it does contain narrative elements. Similarly they should see that the primary method of organization is not narrative, that Twain is observing and reflecting on the incident he describes, and hence that this essay, though prose, is not primarily a narrative.

The distinction between essay and story is not always sharp, but the essay does have some definable characteristics. One division of literature that has some validity is that between imaginative and non-imaginative. The essay is non-imaginative--primarily because it focuses not so much on narration as it does on interpretation. The essay interprets ideas, actions, current events--what you will. The student will probably be able to think of some clearcut essays that he has read. (The definition of "essay" in the New Collegiate Dictionary is helpful: "A literary composition, analytical or interpretative, dealing with its subject from a more or less limited or personal viewpoint." Contrast this with the NCD definition of "story": "A narrative in either prose or verse; a tale; esp., a fictitious narrative less elaborate than a novel.")

Mark Twain was born in 1835 in Florida, Missouri. In 1839, his family moved to Hannibal, the setting of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. After experience as a printer's apprentice and as a pilot on the Mississippi (the crowning achievement of his life, he thought), he set off for Carson City, where his brother Orion was to be secretary to Governor Nye of the Nevada Territory. After an unfruitful and discouraging attempt at prospecting for gold, he gained employment with the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise as a reporter. It was on this newspaper that he really served his literary apprenticeship, and it was here that he first signed himself Mark Twain. After a serious altercation that led an irate citizen to challenge him to a duel, Mark departed for San Francisco in 1864. He went to Hawaii as a correspondent for two California newspapers and after returning to the United States embarked on a cruise to Europe and the Holy Land. From this point on, Mark Twain belonged to the ages. His growing fame--which began in 1865 with the publication of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"--ultimately made him America's most popular, most respected, and most honored man of letters. Book followed book: The Innocents Abroad (1869), Roughing

It (1872), The Gilded Age (with C. D. Warner, 1873), The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), A Tramp Abroad (1880), Life on the Mississippi (1883), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), and so on.

"The Laborious Ant" is from A Tramp Abroad, in which Twain walks and observes his way around Europe. The locale of the essay is not important in this case, however. Such an observation could as easily have occurred in Twain's back yard as in the Black Forest. Anyone who has observed the meanderings of the common ant across a few feet of ground cannot help but have a sneaking suspicion that Twain is right. Twain is engaged, not very seriously, in exploding a myth. His intention is humorous, and his main technique is exaggeration.

For the essay to have its full effect, you might first read to your class the story of the grasshopper and the ant, pointing out how ancient the story is, and how much a part of folklore and allusion the industry of the ant has become. The biblical passage from Proverbs VI, 6-8, might also be used, for not only does it help illustrate the traditional concept of the industrious ant, but also Twain makes an allusion to the passage in his final paragraph.

> "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise:
> Which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler,
> Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her
> food in the harvest."

Questions and Activities

1. In your own words, tell what you think the main purpose of this essay is. --Some students may say that Twain's main purpose was to describe the antics of an ant. Discussion should lead to their perception that the main purpose is to refute a maxim, and that the incidents described are subordinated to this purpose.

2. Why do you think Twain goes to such lengths of detail in his description of the ant's activities? --There can be several good answers to this question. He wants to convince us of the idiocy of the ant; he wants to make his writing vital; he wants to make us laugh.

3. Was this essay funny? If you thought it was, can you say what made it funny? --Discussion can illustrate several devices of humor. Primarily, of course, Twain uses exaggeration for comic effect. The very cascade of details (supported in form by the long unbroken two middle paragraphs, so that we are psychologically overwhelmed by the massed print) inundates us. Supporting devices of personification ("kicks the dust from his clothes," "wipes the sweat from his brow," etc.) contribute to the effect. The translation into comparable human activity of the labors of the ant makes the whole thing seem ridiculous, so that we are prepared to accept the labors of the ant as an "idiotic miracle for vanity's sake."

4. Good writing is usually vivid. Can you find any words or phrases in this essay which strike you as particularly vivid? --Numerous examples can be

found. The students should see that the use of precise details and vigorous words brings the passage alive.

5. A good piece of writing has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Where would you place the beginning, middle, and end of this essay? What purpose is served by each paragraph? --This is a good example of clear division. The first paragraph sets the scene, localizes the narrator, and justifies his leisure time. The second and third paragraphs deal with the laborious ant. The second deals with the ant in general; the third deals with a specific ant that Twain observed in Germany; thus he has moved from the general to the particular. The final paragraph offers a summary of Twain's conclusions about ants, with the final sentence summarizing the thesis of the whole essay.

6. What does the following sentence mean? "I refer to the ordinary ant, of course; I have had no experience with those wonderful Swiss and African ones which vote, keep drilled armies, hold slaves, and dispute about religion." What does Twain think of Swiss and African ants? --The students should see that Twain has cleverly destroyed the claim to superiority of Swiss and African ants by moving deftly from the believable to the unbelievable. Ants do indeed keep armies and hold slaves, but they do not to our knowledge either vote or discuss religion. Again, destruction by exaggeration: we are persuaded not to believe in the superiority of exotic ants at all, and perhaps not even in their existence. Other examples of such subtleties can be found. The students should see that every detail is selected with an eye to the overall effect, that Twain is exerting constant control over his medium.

7. The last paragraph in the essay follows a very definite arrangement. Can you say what it is? Why do you think Twain used this arrangement? What effect does it have? --Twain makes a statement about the failure of the ant, and then follows this by showing how such failure destroys the ant's function as a symbol. This sentence pattern is repeated several times. Such repetition is one manifestation of parallelism, a term which might be introduced here, though not belabored. The effect is obvious. We get the impression of the summing-up of the case for the prosecution: Twain crisply lists the defects of the ant, and the case against him. The style and structure of this paragraph are in significant contrast to the previous ones. Twain turns to direct, declarative sentences. We are as overwhelmed in a way by the listing of the various offenses of the ant as we were previously by the recitation of his activities.

8. "The Laborious Ant" is an essay. On the basis of your understanding of the word "essay," can you tell why it is so called? How does the essay differ from a story? --See explication. Students should see that in a story the main principle of organization is the narrative, and that in the essay (as in the lyric poem) some other principle of organization is being used. Here narrative elements are subordinated to the purpose of illustration.

Suggestions for Writing

1. Can you think of any other animal who also has a reputation? The elephant is supposed to have a great memory; or the owl is supposed to be wise; or the dog is supposed to be man's best friend. Try to write a

humorous essay in which you explode one of these beliefs. Be sure to write an essay and not a story.

2. Make a collection of all the examples you can find of exaggeration used for comic purposes. You will find many in common sayings, conversation, or books and television.

3. Write a description of the activities of an animal or person in which you use as many vivid words as you can.

4. Write an essay in which you defend the ant against Twain's attack.

IV. Short Story. John Russell, "The Price of the Head"

This story lends itself quite well to a preliminary introduction to the study of literature. The structure is extremely simple, based as it is on a journey. This simple introduction to the journey motif is valuable, for here the students can learn on the most elementary level the potential inherent in this motif, a potential that they will see realized as they study more complex works in the upper grades. Here they should see clearly what they saw in Housman's poem: that the subject of the story is actually the duality of the nature of man and the world, and that the two are impossible to separate. For just as Housman's poem combines an experience and the poet's reaction to it, so here the theme of the story grows out of the action. They should see that the subject of the story is more than a physical journey, that it is actually a journey on both levels, physical and spiritual, that Pellett's salvation and his ability to make a decision about ethical values is a result of his physical experiences.

The form of the story is simple. The students should see how detail and incident are built around the structure of a journey from one place to another. It might do to point out but not belabor the idea they will be dealing with later: that subject and form are but two aspects of the same thing. Incidental details of structure can be brought in to show the students how in a good story detail is subordinated to overall purpose. The emphasis on Pellett's beard and Karaki's care for it; the emphasis on the axe, and the description of it as a tomahawk; Karaki's concern for his weapons; the description of Pellett "fattening" on coconuts and being brought to Bougainville "on the hoof," which shows how Karaki regards him and which contributes to the irony of the story--all these can be brought out as contributing to the overall effect of the story.

This is a good work in which to discuss the possibilities and limitations of Point of View. In the Housman poem students saw how it was possible to write in the third person, although doing so destroyed the immediacy of the poem. Here they could see that the situation demands a third person narrator: that Karaki is unsatisfactory as a narrator, and that Pellett, of course, is dead. As introduction to later aspects of Point of View, they could see that although there is an omniscient narrator, the focus of attention is on Pellett's state of mind, and that hence the Point of View contributes to our awareness of what the subject of the story really is.

We also have here a good illustration of the practical impossibility of concentrating exclusively at all times on the work of literature itself; we must bring some knowledge and experience to it. For the teacher will probably have to do considerable explaining to some students about such things as Karaki's position as an indentured servant, the question of the limits of British authority and Bougainville, Pellett's background and how we know it, etc.

Questions and Activities

1. There will be many unfamiliar words in this story. Make a list of them, and look up their meanings in a dictionary.

2. In the story, there may be certain passages that you do not understand. Be sure that you have your teacher explain these passages to you.

3. During the story, Karaki does many things for Pellett. What things can you find, not necessarily physical, that Pellett does for himself? --For instance, until about paragraph 74, Pellett is virtually inert; but gradually he begins to come to life: he swims and helps Karaki with the proa. Although it is important that the students should recognize Pellett's total dependence on Karaki, they should also see that Pellett recovers some of his character for himself. He takes some active part in the process of his own redemption. Although he is placed in a situation where he cannot escape from "the devils of his past," nonetheless he meets this situation actively: "But here there was no escape of any kind. So he turned and grappled with them and laid them one by one."

4. In your own words, give a short summary of the story.

5. Who "tells" the story? Have you ever read a story in which the author speaks as if he took part in the events? --At this point, it might be well to explain once again the concept of narrative Point of View. The story is, of course, written from the third person omniscient Point of View.

Medium

6. At the beginning of the story, Russell lists Pellett's possessions. At the end, he gives a "corrected" list. Each list contains five things. How do the two lists differ? Which set of possessions does Russell think more valuable? Which does Pellett? Which does Karaki? Which do you? Discuss with students the two lists. Make them see that from the standpoint of structure this is a neat device, containing as it does the point of the story. They should see that Pellett regards the corrected list as worth the price of his life, but that the only way he has reached that decision is through the unconscious therapy of the journey.

7. If Karaki is going to kill Pellett, how can he be considered Pellett's "good friend?" Do you think Karaki acted as he did through friendship? --This is, of course, the irony of the tale. Karaki at no time knows what friendship means, and has no feelings towards Pellett except as the living

carrier of the coveted whiskers. But actually, though unwittingly, he does Pellett a great service.

8. What is the author's attitude toward Melanesians? (See paragraphs 4, 5, and 6). --This question should introduce the students to the question of "tone." A good case could be made for the view that Russell is doing a deadpan satire of the typical colonial attitude towards natives. This is perhaps most obvious in paragraph 6.

9. What is the author's attitude toward Pellett? (See paragraphs 2 and 3). --This question will probably receive a variety of answers, probably depending on the home life of the students as much as anything else. They should be brought to see that Russell himself neither praises norcondemns Pellett: rather, he shows us with some objectivity a man who has neither harm nor good in him.

10. What do "The Price of the Head" and "Bishop Hatto" have in common? --The students should note that both are primarily narratives, as opposed to the lyric and the essay. They should also note that both narratives exist for more than the story alone, that each is making a statement about the human condition. Discussion of differences will help distinguish between verse and prose.

11. Name some important differences between "The Price of the Head" and "The Laborious Ant." --This question should direct discussion toward reinforcement of the student's understanding of essay versus story.

12. Were you surprised to find the reason for Karaki's friendship for Pellett? Might you have suspected the outcome? Where in the story do you find clues about what is going to happen? --The main clue is the title. Another is Karaki's care of Pellett's beard and hair. And yet another is the puzzling lack of ostensible motivation for Karaki's abduction of Pellett.

Difficult

13. Russell tells us that the black man saves the white man from drink, illness, madness, starvation, and ravening waters. In what other way is Pellett "saved" by Karaki? --Bring up the question of salvation. The students should see how Karaki deliberately saves Pellett from all physical dangers and unconsciously saves his soul. They should see the irony of Karaki unconsciously achieving that which Pellett learns to value most highly. See if they can't get the irony of the title. The duality of existence is neatly symbolized by the head. Karaki values it for its externals, while Pellett learns to value what is inside it.

14. In what way can this story be called a voyage of discovery? Who discovers what? Would it be fair to say that the subject of this story is only a voyage? If not, what else is it about? --See explication.

15. If you pay for something you want, you are dealing in a system of values, just as a nickel for a candy bar represents a system of values. At the end of this story, each man has paid something for what he wants. What does Karaki pay? What does Pellett pay? What statement about values is Russell making in this story? Ask them to try to make a statement of the value system that the story expounds. If a candy bar is worth a nickel, a soul is worth one's life.

Lit/I/TV/TrBal

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

THE TRADITIONAL BALLAD--NARRATIVE POETRY

Literature Curriculum I

Teacher Version

FOREWORD

Acquainting students of the seventh grade with the study of the ballad as a literary genre is the chief purpose of this unit. The ballad, like all literary works, has a subject, a form, and a point of view. Ballad subjects are as varied as are human experiences. Love, hate, fear, revenge: all human emotions are immortalized by the balladeer as are all manners of events involving human beings. But these are also the subject matter of the novel, the short story, the essay, and indeed, most literary types. Another similarity between the ballad and other genres is point of view: in the ballad the point of view is that of the impersonal, detached third person as is the point of view of so much narrative literature.

It is thus in the form of the ballad rather than in the subject matter or the point of view that we observe distinct qualities which make it an identifiable literary type and which, therefore, dictate certain concerns emphasized in this unit. The subtle interrelationship of subject, point of view, and form in the ballad, however, must be perceived before one can appreciate this literary genre.

Ballads included here demonstrate the specific aspects of traditional ballad form which we feel seventh grade students need to know. The vocabulary of everyday speech, the preponderance of dialogue, the lack of detail, the episodic nature of the narrative, the abrupt ending, the use of repetition, the ballad stanza are all readily identified in the ballads chosen for study. The manner in which these particulars of form are presented determines the value of the unit. If the teacher follows the inductive approach inherent in the unit, students will not fall into the dangerous trap of assuming that form is an end in itself. The correct attitude in regard to the usefulness of critical terminology in the study of literature may be developed if students study the literary work first and then learn how to express judgments regarding it. Literary terms do not represent rules and classification to which literature must conform. Rather they are useful, convenient words which help the young critic understand and evaluate a literary selection.

Selections in this unit reflect a necessary caution. Although many characteristics are identified in most ballads, no two ballads are exactly the same. Variations are to be expected and longed for. For example, the typical ballad stanza is not found in every ballad. Some ballads provide more detail than others; some use a great deal of dialogue; others use it sparingly. The four selections show this variety clearly without overshadowing the striking similarities which make them a part of a literary genre.

Appropriateness of subject matter was also considered in the ballad selections. Disaster at sea, devotion to duty, treachery, injustice, the loneliness of death: all have particular appeal to the sensitive seventh grade student and all are common ballad subjects.

Point of view did not influence the selection measurably, for all traditional ballads reflect the balladeer's impersonal, detached attitude toward the subject.

Since American balladeers borrowed so heavily from the traditional British ballads, two British ballads of literary repute ("Sir Patrick Spens" and "Johnnie Armstrong") and one American ballad ("Jesse James") were chosen.

THE BALLAD
Background Material

Although completely satisfactory answers regarding ballad origin, age, and transmission are not available, teachers should acquaint themselves with meaningful research in so far as it proves helpful in analyzing selected ballads and in making generalizations regarding the ballad as a literary type. Teachers should, for example, attempt to construct a definition of the ballad after thoughtful examination of selected ballads and should encourage students to do the same. Following this inductive process, standard definitions will prove useful as a possible measure of the teachers' powers of analysis and generalization. Teachers should supplement the minimum background provided below by reading extensively from the suggested bibliography.

What is a ballad?

A ballad is a song that tells a story. Bartlett J. Whiting in Traditional British Ballads expands this definition as follows: "It is plain in diction and imagery, it tells an elemental story of universal appeal, it concentrates on a single incident, it is sparing of explanatory details and background, it often begins *in medias res*, it employs abrupt transitions, it makes free use of dialogue and calculated repetition, its emphasis is on action rather than reflection, it is associated with a tune which is often more stable than its text, and it tells its tale impersonally without author's asides or editorial comment."[1]

Types of ballads

Traditional ballads (popular or folk ballads) are "short lyric tales. . . preserved among the people, and having an existence which has become purely oral and traditional."[2] These songs were composed by artists whose names are unknown, were handed down from generation to generation, and in time were recorded by a collector of ballads.

Literary ballads are poems written by a poet in imitation of the folk ballad. "Literary ballads usually tell a more complex story than popular ballads, perhaps involving subtle and complex psychological processes and relationships. The writer brings to his material all the techniques he commands as a poet - from highly connotative diction to figurative language, vivid imagery, and even symbolism. Yet he attempts to capture something of the flavor of the popular ballad. He may use dialogue, leaping and lingering, an abrupt beginning, even stock figures of speech."[3]

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[1] Bartlett J. Whiting, Traditional British Ballads (New York, 1955), p.VII.

[2] Walter Blair and W. K. Chandler, Approaches to Poetry (New York, 1953), p. 7.

[3] James R. Kreuzer, Elements of Poetry (New York, 1955)pp. 212-213.

Who is largely responsible for the collection of ballads most commonly used today?

Francis James Child's collection, The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, in five volumes (Boston, 1882-98) comprises the largest bulk of the ballads known today. The collection includes 305 pieces, most of them in a number of different versions. Professor Child was inspired by Svend Grundtvig's edition of traditional Danish ballads; Grundtvig, in turn, had been influenced by William Motherwell, a Scottish collector whose precursor was Sir Walter Scott. Scott's inspiration came from Thomas Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.

What is the origin of the ballad?

Opinions vary concerning the origin of the ballad. Some feel that a singer decided that a great event or an interesting story should be celebrated and thus composed a song about it. The composer handed the song over to the people (folk) for oral transmission. If the people accepted the ballad, it ceased to be the property of the author and became the possession of the people. Passing from singer to singer, from group to group, the song changed considerably. Old stanzas were dropped and new ones added; rhymes were altered; the names of the characters were changed. If a ballad remained popular for two or three centuries, the linguistic changes would become so extreme that the original author would very likely not recognize his work.

Some scholars, notably the Grimm brothers, contend that the word ballad comes from the word ballet, meaning dance-song, and that early ballads were stories chanted in a certain way while people danced to their accompaniment. They believed that no single author was re responsible for original composition, but that in a community gathering various poets improvised parts of the narrative and the whole group joined in the refrain. The ballad, according to this group of scholars, is considered the result of community or "communal" authorship.

Recent scholarship seems to accept a middle ground and proposes the theory that the most effective ballads were, of necessity, composed by individual authors with conscious artistry. Often the balladeers edited existing ballads, revising and refining them according to the conventions of the ballad. Such a theory does not, however, preclude the possibility of "communal re-creation."

How old are the ballads?

Of the 305 ballads collected by Child, only eleven are unquestionably older than the seventeenth century, and most belong to the eighteenth and nineteenth. Some scholars argue that the ballad is a relatively late development. Others believe that the ballad flourished during the middle ages - that Angles and Saxons had them in abundance when they invaded Britain. Medieval chroniclers give adequate evidence that ballad-singing was the rule rather than the exception. Evidence is sufficient to indicate that ballads were plentiful from the early days of English history to the seventeenth century when many were written

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down for the first time. "Judas," dating back to the thirteenth century, is interesting in that it is such a typical ballad in meter, phraseology, and atmosphere. "St. Stephen and Herod," in a manuscript of around 1450, demonstrates similar qualities. Weighing such evidence, some scholars conclude that although the vast majority of ballads were not reduced to writing or print until the seventeenth century or later, ballads were very popular for many centuries and were transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Two characteristics of ballad form are so common and so frequently spoken of that it might be well to lead students toward an understanding of them. The ballad stanza takes the following form: four lines in which the first and the third have four accented syllables and the second anf fourth, three, rhyming ABAC. For example:

He túrned his fáce untó the wáll,
    And déath with hím was déaling:
"Adiéu, adiéu, my déar friends áll;
    Be kínd to Bárbara Állen!"

The scansion of this stanza from "Barbara Allen's Cruelty" is fairly regular, but we should never assume that any meter in any poem will be exactly regular: exact regularity brings about a singsong effect that makes for monotony. Rather, in any scansion, we ought always to be aware that we must read for sense and syntax; the meter in a good poem will come therefrom. In your discussion of the form of the ballad stanza, you should make it clear to students that general patterns of meter are perceptible, but that these patterns are not straitjackets. Furthermore, not all ballads are written in the so-called ballad stanza.

"The Golden Vanity" presents a good example of incremental repetition:

There was a gallant ship, a gallent ship was she,
And the name of the ship was "The Golden Vanity,"
And they feared she would be taken by the Turkish enemy
    As she sailed upon the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
    As she sailed upon the Lowland sea.

Then up came a little cabin boy, and thus spoke he,
Speaking to the captain, "What will you give to me
If I swim alongside of the Turkish enemy
    And sink her in the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
    And sink her in the Lowland sea?"

I'll give you an estate in the North Countrie,
And my one and only daughter your lovely bride shall be,
If you'll swim alongside the Turkish enemy
    And sink her in the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
    And sink her in the Lowland sea."

Then the boy made ready and overboard sprang he,
And swam alongside of the Turkish enemy,
And with his auger sharp in her side he bored holes three,
  And he sunk her in the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
  He sunk her in the Lowland sea.

Then the boy swam around, and back again swam he,
And he called to the captain of "The Golden Vanity."
But the captain mocked, "You can drown all of me!"
  And he left him in the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
  He left him in the Lowland sea.

The boy swam around, he came to the port side,
He looked up at his messmates, and bitterly he cried:
"Oh, messmates, take me up, for I'm drifting with the tide,
  And I'm sinking in the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
  I'm sinking in the Lowland sea."

His messmates took him up, but on the deck he died,
And they sewed him in a hammock that was so large and wide.
They lowered him overboard, but he drifted with the tide,
  And he sank beneath the Lowland, Lowland, Lowland,
  He sank beneath the Lowland sea.

The refrain of each stanza is some variation on "Lowland, Lowland, Lowland . . . the Lowland sea." This device is incremental repetition: the repetition of a basic phrase or refrain, each time with changes which advance the story or our understanding of it.

We can make some fairly accurate generalizations about the ballad as an art form, and these generalizations move us toward a usable definition of the ballad. These generalizations are (a) the ballad is episodic, (b) it begins and ends abruptly, (c) it contains a refrain, (d) it uses rhyme and rhythm, (e) its narrator is impersonal, (f) its narrator does not express moral judgment, and (g) its narrator comments indirectly about man and his environment. Not all of these generalizations fit every ballad; for instance, in "Jesse James" the narrator does express a specific moral judgment. Nonetheless, the generalizations do provide a working description of the nature of that form of poetry called the ballad.

Assignment 1

Before introducing a ballad, it would be a good idea to discuss ballad subject matter. A ballad is a song that tells a story. The song may tell of outlaws, pirates, heroes, criminals; it may sing of love, sentiment, fear, tragedy, injustice. The stories in the ballad may be either entirely fictional or based on history. The best ballads, then, deal with basic and moving topics -- incidents which appeal to our sense of tragedy, pathos, fear, or joy -- to those elemental emotions by which all people of all times and all places are united.

The first ballad, "Sir Patrick Spens," is the first selection on the tape. It would be well to ask the class to read the ballad silently as you play the recording; then ascertain that everyone understands the story and the dialect.

Explication of "Sir Patrick Spens"

A sailor, Sir Patrick Spens, is called upon to serve his king by guiding "this ship of mine" across a stormy sea. The ship and the ship's crew meet with disaster and lie "fifty fathoms deep." The subject-matter is typical. Ballads frequently tell of brave men who reveal high courage and spirit as they answer duty's call. The men and events may or may not be historical. An episode is presented rather that a complete story: non-essentials are omitted. The ballad begins close to the climactic episode of an event. Why does the king need to sail his ship to some unnamed port on an unnamed mission? Why does the "older knight" suggest that Sir Patrick Spens undertake the dangerous voyage? The balladeer does not tell us.

Rapid transitions are apparent. The king writes a letter to Sir Patrick Spens who "was walking on the sand." The shift from place to place is exceedingly abrupt; scene after scene flashes by without connective or explanation. The ballad leaps and lingers. Eight lines are devoted to Sir Patrick's reaction to the king's letter, and then the balladeer leaps into the command given by "the best sailor" to his men. Four lines later the disaster has occurred; for eight lines the balladeer lingers with the ladies as they wait for "their own dear lords." The shift from narrative to dialogue comes at strategic points in the story. The dialogue is brisk, compressed, revealing. Frequently the identity of the speaker must be inferred from what is being said. Sir Patrick Spens reads the letter, laughs, weeps, and then accepts his fate. At this crucial point he speaks:

"O who is this has done this deed,
  This ill deed done to me,
To send me out this time o' year,
  To sail upon the sea?"

He speaks immediately to his "merry men" who answer him immediately. No details are given; none are expected in the ballad.

The vocabulary is unsophisticated. The only two words that have more than two syllables are place names. Stock images ("blude-red wine") and epithets ("merry men") characterize "Sir Patrick Spens". Incremental repetition occurs in stanzas nine and ten. The ballad stanza is clearly exemplified in this selection. This ballad reveals the objective, impersonal approach of the unknown author. The tale is told; judgments are withheld; the teller and the listener accept without apparent question the fact that the cruel universe has claimed "good Sir Patrick Spens wi' the Scots lords at his feet."

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. In your own words, write the story of "Sir Patrick Spens." --See explication for a summary of the story.

2. How do the sailors react to Sir Patrick's order to make ready to sail? Be specific. Indicate the parts of the text that lead you to your answer. --In stanza seven, one of the sailors says, "And I fear, I fear, my dear master,/ That we will come to harm."

3. Do the Scots lords remain faithful to Sir Patrick to the end? Explain. --Indeed they do. Even though they fear the voyage, they embark with Sir Patrick. Some students might see the irony of the ending of the poem, for even in death the Scots lords are at the feet of their captain.

4. Make a list of the words that you don't understand. Can you guess their meanings?

5. What is the nationality of Sir Patrick? How do you know? --The poem tells us that he leads the "Scots lords."

Medium

6. Why do you think that the "older knight" suggested Sir Patrick for the mission (stanza two)? --We don't know for certain; however, we can guess that somehow there must have been enmity between the older knight and Sir Patrick. After all, the older knight sat at the king's right knee, while Sir Patrick was apparently exiled to some remote place. Furthermore, Sir Patrick's reaction when he received the letter implies that somehow he had a flash of insight about why he was being sent. Putting all of the clues together, we might feel that the older knight was plotting against Sir Patrick, but the poem does not give us enough evidence for a certain conclusion.

7. Does stanza five in any way explain the action of the older knight? --Sir Patrick tells us, in so many words, that he feels he is the victim of a conspiracy. Since it was the older knight who suggested Spens, we have more evidence for the argument advanced in question 6.

8. Explain these lines from stanza eight:

> But long before the play was play'd,
> Their broad hats they did lose.

--The lines simply mean that Sir Patrick and his men were to drown, but, of course, their hats would float above them.

9. What part do the ladies play in the ballad? --The poet tells us that the ladies will wait futilely for their knights' return.

This introduction of the doomed knights' loved ones into the poem is important in that it illustrates to the reader the tragedy of the men's fate. It is the most genuinely pathetic element in the ballad.

10. Do we learn anything about the character of Sir Patrick? Explain. What kind of man was he? --Within the short compass of the ballad, we learn a great deal about Sir Patrick. First, we realize that he is completely loyal and obedient. Even though he suspects the fatality of the king's order, he carries out his mission. We learn, furthermore, that he has the loyalty of his men, for they are willing to go to their deaths with him. Once again, the irony of the ending is a poetic reinforcement of the theme of the men's loyalty.

Difficult

11. In stanza one, the wine is described as "blude-red." What effect does that particular description have on the ballad?--The description of the wine fits well with the nature of the poem. In the first place, some wine is actually blood-red. But the word "blood" is associated with tragedy and death. Thus, the description of the wine hints at the tragic outcome of the ballad and helps establish the mood.

12. In stanza three, we find that Sir Patrick was walking on the sand. Why do you think he was not at court with the king? --As we have seen, there is some evidence that Sir Patrick was in disfavor or even in exile. We cannot know for certain, however. All we do know is that, when the poem begins, he is away from the court and thus cannot state his own case to the king. He must carry out his orders unquestioningly.

13. When Sir Patrick receives the letter (stanza four), he first laughs and then cries. Why? Explain. --We could interpret these actions thus: the laugh is one of cognition, that is, Sir Patrick immediately understands his plight and perhaps that the older knight has worked in bad faith; he laughs in the desperate way that a condemned man might laugh. Certainly it is not a laugh of humor. After he laughs, the full realization of what he must do comes over him, and he cries, for he understands that he must risk his own life and the lives of his Scots lords. It should be understood that this is a possible interpretation. Regardless of how much we speculate, a great deal that is enigmatic remains about Sir Patrick's reaction to receiving the letter.

14. Name some important things that we are told about the plot of the ballad. Name some important things that we must guess at. Can we always arrive at a clear-cut answer?--For instance, we are told that the king needs a "good sailor" to sail his ship, but we are not told the mission of the ship. We find that Sir Patrick is far from the court, but we do not know why. We encounter the enigmatic laugh. And so on. We can

guess the reasons for much of the action; for instance, we can guess that Sir Patrick was the victim of the older knight.

Assignment 2

You might let the students read the ballad aloud, or at least have three or four students read the ballad to the class. Make clear that they should not distort words or meaning in order to make the rhyme fit exactly to any pattern. They should read as naturally as possible. See "Background Material" for a discussion of this point.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. How many stressed syllables are in each line of each stanza? How do the stanzas rhyme? --"Sir Patrick Spens" is a good example of the use of the ballad stanza. Let students determine inductively that in general the first and third lines contain four stresses, while the second and fourth contain three. The students should have no trouble determining the rhyme scheme. Once they have done this, you might point out to them that they have arrived at a definition of the ballad stanza.

2. Are all of the rhymes in the poem exact? --They are not. In stanza six, we find "morn-storm," and in stanza eleven, we find "deep-feet."

Medium

3. Notice that the ballad has no introduction. The action starts immediately. Why do you think this is the case? --See introductory material at the beginning of this unit. It is characteristic of the economy of the ballad that it starts immediately, with no preliminary material, no scene-setting, no peroration. The ballad is characterized by compression and economy, as it must be if a fairly complex story is to be told in short compass.

4. Write your own story of Sir Patrick Spens. In your story answer all of the questions that the reader might ask. Tell why Sir Patrick was not at court, explain why the king thought the mission was important, and so on. Which is more interesting and intriguing, your story or the ballad? Explain. --The student should enjoy this assignment, for he can freely use his invention to fill in the details of the story of Sir Patrick. He might say that when we know all of the answers, some of the fun of the ballad is gone. That is, he might arrive at the conclusion that a good deal of the effect of the ballad depends upon what he as a reader or listener must bring to it. The

ballad, in a unique kind of way, demands the imaginative participation of the reader or listener.

5. Identify the beginning, middle, and end of the ballad. --We should not dogmatize about structure. Nonetheless, in this ballad there are rather clear divisions. One possibility: stanzas one through three (the writing of the letter), stanzas four to eight (the reaction to the letter); stanzas nine to eleven (the result).

6. What is the high point of the action of the story? Why? --There is no hard and fast answer to this question. Is the high point stanza five, in which we discover that Sir Patrick feels he has been made a victim and tells of the perils of the voyage? Is it stanza eight, in which we are told the outcome of the story?

Difficult

7. What are the similarities between "Bishop Hatto" and "Sir Patrick Spens"? What are the differences? --Both, of course, are poems that tell a story, that is, they are narrative poems. But "Bishop Hatto" relies much less on hints and implication than does "Sir Patrick Spens." "Bishop Hatto" is also a much more detailed narrative. "Sir Patrick Spens'" reliance on hints and implication and its compression are characteristic of ballads.

8. Does whoever is telling the story show how he feels about any of the people in the story? Does he say they are right or wrong in what they do? Is he saying anything, in a general way, about man and his world? --The balladeer is characteristically (though not always) impersonal. He does not levy judgment on his characters; he leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions. Such is the case in "Sir Patrick Spens." Perhaps the ballad makes a comment on the injustice of the world and on the value of loyalty. It may, of course, imply other "moral" lessons, but in essence it is a narrative, not a sermon.

Assignment 3: "Johnnie Armstrong"

This is the second selection on the tape. Have the class read the ballad silently as the recording is played; then make sure that everyone understands the story.

Explication

The first two stanzas of this ballad set the stage for the complete story. Although Johnnie Armstrong and his men are outlaws, they manage to live quite well in "fair Westmoreland."

He had neither lands nor rents coming in,
  Yet he kept eight score men in his hall.
He had horse and harness for them all,
  Fine steeds all milky white:
The golden bands about their necks,
  And their weapons, were all alike.

The actual story begins with stanza three. News of Johnnie Armstrong's existence and his activities is brought to the attention of the king who writes to Johnnie, inviting him to the palace and promising "to do him no wrong." From this point on the ballad is dramatically presented through a series of scenes. Stanza five describes Johnnie as flattered and honored:

"Never was an Armstrong sent for by the king;
  Not my father, my grandfather, nor none but me."

A holiday atmosphere pervades stanzas six, seven, and eight as Johnnie and his band of eight score dress carefully and correctly for the momentous occasion. Dialogue begins to replace description; and from stanza six to the end of the poem, events become more dramatic. The story moves quickly to a climax (the treachery) and then broadens out to an unexpected ending.

In stanza nine, Johnnie, in humble terms, greets the king only to be quickly informed that he and his men "shalt all hang on the gallows tree." Johnnie retaliates immediately, urging his followers into action:

Saying, "Fight on, fight on, my merry men.
  And see that none of you be taken
For rather than men shall say we were hanged,
  Let them say how we were slain."

From here on there is little description, and the reader's impression of Johnnie Armstrong's bravery and concern for his men is formed primarily from the action and dialogue in stanzas twelve and thirteen. The furious battle takes its toll of Scots while Johnnie:

  Like a madman then fought he,
Until a coward Scot came at Johnnie behind
  And ran him through his fair body.

But never admitting defeat, Johnnie promises to rejoin the fray:

"I'll lie me down to bleed for a while,
  Then I'll rise and fight again."

The final stanza shifts the setting and the ballad ends with a prophecy of future violence, for young Johnnie Armstrong vows vengeance.

Rapid action and excitement is created in this ballad primarily through its use of dialogue. We feel a closeness to the action of the story because speakers voice their reactions directly to us rather than through the possibly diluted account of a narrator. There,is, of course, a narrator; but he maintains that impersonal point of view typical of traditional ballads. He refrains from making editorial comment. Consider, for example, how little is said about Johnnie's feelings during the moment he realizes treachery:

> Johnnie looked over his left shoulder,
> And a grievous look looked he !

The lines stimulate the reader's imagination as to what Johnnie's feelings must have been during that moment of discovery, but they do not interpret. In similar manner, specific details are presented throughout the poem, and the reader is permitted to make his own judgments. One advantage of presenting a story in this manner is that the reader becomes involved.

Explanation of Assignments

Before any serious discussion of this ballad concerning form and point of view can take place, the teacher should play the recording and help students understand the plot thoroughly. "Johnnie Armstrong" should be particularly appealing to seventh grade students. The drama of a brave outlaw living by a code, refusing to compromise with his King even in the face of death presents enough of romantic heroism to win the young readers' sympathy for the protagonist. The selection is an excellent illustration of how much force an incident can receive through the ballad form. Its lack of unnecessary detail, its compactness, its rhythm and rhyme propel the story to its inevitable outcome. The narrator's impersonal point of view allows the reader to form his own attitudes about the actions and characters in the story.

The teacher should present this ballad at a rather rapid pace since the knowledge gained in "Sir Patrick Spens" is applicable to this ballad. Student assignments focus on subject, form, and point of view. Questions dealing with subject matter pinpoint the courage of the outlaw and the treachery of the king and elicit from the students an evaluation of the personalities as evidenced in their deeds. Assignments concerning form reemphasize certain techniques (dialogue, rhyme, refrain) already examined in "Sir Patrick Spens". The assignment dealing with point of view helps students recognize the typical, impersonal approach found in all ballads.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. How many men did Johnnie keep? --Eight score, or one hundred sixty.

2. Tell the story in your own words. --For a synopsis, see explication.

3. Why did the king want to capture Johnnie? --Because Johnnie was an outlaw. See stanza three.

4. Did you notice that colors play an important part in the ballad? Describe the dress of Johnnie's men. --See stanzas six and seven.

Medium

5. How many changes of setting do you recognize in the ballad? Write a description of each setting. --Actually, there are only two, unless we count the last stanza as a change in setting. The first setting is Westmoreland (stanzas one through eight, though the ballad mentions the trip to "Edinburgh"), and the second is the palace in "Edinburgh" stanzas nine through sixteen.

6. Although most ballads plunge right into the story, the actual story of Johnnie Armstrong does not begin with the first line. Where does the story really begin?--The student ought almost immediately to recognize the difference in the beginnings of "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Johnnie Armstrong." The latter ballad supplied some necessary background information about Johnnie and his way of life. The action really begins in stanza three, when the king receives news of Johnnie and his way of life.

7. Look up the meaning of "perfidy." What part does perfidy play in this ballad? --The whole story centers around the king's perfidy; it is the king's perfidy in breaking his promise to Johnnie that sways the reader's sympathies toward Johnnie.

8. What is the king's outstanding characteristic? Which person, the king or Johnnie, do you admire more? Why? --See question eight. The whole problem of the ballad revolves around Johnnie's perhaps naive trust of the king and the king's faithlessness. For this reason, most readers will sympathize with Johnnie the outlaw, rather than with the king.

9. What kind of life did Johnnie and his men have in their borderland home? The "yet" in stanza one is very important. What does it tell about Johnnie and his men? --Obviously Johnnie led a luxurious existence; he had a hundred and sixty

retainers with milk white steeds for all of them, and so on. The "yet" in stanza one is a hint at Johnnie's means of livelihood. The stanza says, in effect, that Johnnie had no apparent source of revenue, yet he lived quite literally like a king.

10. The subject matter of "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Johnnie Armstrong" is very similar. List all the points related to subject matter which these two ballads have in common. --Among other similarities is the implied perfidy in "Sir Patrick Spens" and the open perfidy in "Johnnie Armstrong." Both ballads deal with the faithfulness of retainers to their lords. Both speak of bravery and loyalty. There are, of course, other similarities.

11. The use of repetition is characteristic of ballads. See if you can find good examples of repetition in "Johnnie Armstrong." --The most obvious use of repetition is the ballad's repeated mentioning of the eight score men. That fact that Johnnie had so many retainers shows both his success as a leader and his ability to gain the loyalty of his followers.

12. How many of the seventeen stanzas involve conversation? Why do you suppose the balladeer prefers to use conversation rather than description? --Dialogue is more economical than description, and ballads are characteristically economical. Also, dialogue is more direct; it adds life to the narrative.

13. With whom do you sympathize, Johnnie or the king? Why? --See explication and the answer to questions eight, nine, and twelve.

Difficult

14. Does the balladeer side with either the king or Johnnie? What characteristic of the ballad does this point of view demonstrate? --The balladeer, of course, withholds judgment. He does not comment on the characters. This objectivity demonstrates the ballad's characteristic impersonality.

15. Does this ballad present a system of values? That is, does it imply that some of men's actions are better or worse than others? Explain the system of values in "Johnnie Armstrong." --The ballad does, indeed, imply a system of values. In this system, loyalty and trust are much prized, while perfidy is the most ignoble of human characteristics. For this reason, we value Johnnie and despise the king.

16. Is the form of "Johnnie Armstrong" like that of "Sir Patrick Spens"? Explain. --The poem is written in ballad stanzas, but they are much less amenable to scansion than those of "Sir Patrick Spens." For instance, while stanza nine scans with some ease and regularity, stanza seven is

highly irregular. Nonetheless, in stanza form, both ballads are comparable.

Assignment 4

The class should read "Jesse James" silently as you play the recording; then ascertain that everyone understands the story.

Explication

"Jesse James" may well be considered a counterpart of the Scottish robber-baron ballad, "Johnnie Armstrong." These two ballads have similarities in historical origin, in the nature of their subject, and in their form. "Johnnie Armstrong" is the literary produce of a Scottish peasant faction of the sixteenth century, while "Jesse James" is the produce of an unsophisticated American frontier. As far as subject matter is concerned, the protagonist in each ballad personifies an unusually courageous man who experiences treachery and death. Both demonstrate admirable qualities which overshadow their faults, causing the reader to place these men in more respectable positions than perhaps they deserve.

Possibly because the ballad grew out of a very practical society, the balladeer's treatment of Jesse James is considerably more realistic than "Johnnie Armstrong." Quite clearly the reader is informed that Jesse himself is well versed in the techniques of plunder and murder. Nevertheless, his humane qualities seem to overshadow his wanton acts. The refrain suggests that he is a good husband and father:

> Poor Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life,
> His children they were brave;
> But that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard
> And laid poor Jesse in the grave!

This point is made again in stanza six:

> It was on a Saturday night, Jesse was at home,
> Talking with his family brave.
> Robert Ford came along like a thief in the night
> And laid poor Jesse in the grave.

Even the assassin responsible for the treachery enjoys Jesse's generosity:

> It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward,
> I wonder how he does feel;
> For he ate of Jesse's bread and slept in Jesse's bed
> And laid poor Jesse in the grave.

The courage and invincibility of Jesse is expressed in stanza seven as two lines of admiration for Jesse are balanced against two lines of objection to Robert Ford's treacherous actions:

> The people held their breath when they heard of Jesse's death
> And wondered how he ever came to die.
> It was one of the gang called little Robert Ford,
> He shot poor Jesse on the sly.

The closing stanza sums up the balladeer's admiration for Jesse, and in so doing departs from the traditional anonymity of ballad authors:

> This song was made by Billy Gashade
> As soon as the news did arrive.
> He said there is no man with the law in his hand
> Can take Jesse James when alive.

Except for point of view and lack of dialogue, the ballad follows the traditional pattern. The meter and rhyme are regular, and the use of the refrain after each stanza holds the story together. Absence of dialogue weakens the dramatic impact of this ballad. Because descriptive narration takes its place, the balladeer is forced to enter the poem; and the impersonal point of view, typical of traditional ballads, is lost.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. Who is the villain of the poem? Why? --The villain, of course, is Robert Ford. Note that the balladeer interjects his personal opinion into this ballad; he calls Robert Ford a "dirty little coward." If Jesse is the hero--which he clearly is--then Robert Ford must necessarily be the villain. As a supplementary exercise, you might ask one of the students to look up the etymology of the word "villain."

2. What do the title heroes of "Jesse James" and "Johnnie Armstrong" have in common? --Most obviously, they are both outlaws. We also find that both characters were capable of eliciting loyalty and love, Johnnie from his retainers and son, Jesse from his wife and children, not to mention the community at large. There are other similarities.

3. Name some of the characters in American history who would make good subjects for ballads. --Almost any well known person--from George Washington to Wyatt Earp--would serve as ballad material. However, some students will recognize that only certain incidents, fairly limited in scope, are good ballad material. Thus, the incident of the cherry tree would work, while the Revolutionary War would not, and so on.

4. Does this "modern" ballad contain the traditional form of rhyme, rhythm, and refrain? --See explication. Once

again, stress that students should not try to make every line or every stanza fit the procrustean bed of a defined form.

Medium

5. Who wrote the ballad of Jesse James? If we know who wrote it, can we still call it a traditional ballad? --Stanza nine says that "This song was made by Billy Gashade." Thus, the balladeer apparently identifies himself. Even though we apparently know the author of "Jesse James," the ballad is still traditional, for it has entered the folk heritage and, like other ballads, has been passed on by word of mouth. The point here is this: ballads need not be anonymous, though most of them are.

6. To what famous character of song, story, and legend can you compare Jesse James? --He has been called the American Robin Hood. See stanza one, the alternate reading. As a supplementary assignment, you might ask your students to look up one or two of the many English ballads of Robin Hood and to compare the Robin Hood materials with "Jesse James."

7. Could Jesse James be called an American folk hero? Explain. --There is good reason for calling Jesse an American folk hero. He stands, in the public mind, as a fighter against oppression, as the individual asserting himself against all authority. It might be interesting to have a student read the article on Jesse James in an encyclopedia and to compare the real Jesse with the popular image of him. It might also be interesting to ask some students to explain why Jesse James has appealed so deeply to Americans, as Robin Hood has to both Britons and Americans.

8. Does the author show his attitude toward the characters? How so? What is that attitude? --Unlike most ballads, "Jesse James" is not impersonal. The balladeer calls Robert Ford a "dirty little coward" and characterizes Jesse as "poor." So that in this ballad, we clearly see the maker's attitude. Unlike "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Johnnie Armstrong," "Jesse James" is not impersonal. See also the explication.

9. What does the balladeer seem to think makes Robert Ford's action particularly bad? --See stanza two. Robert Ford had been a guest in Jesse's house, had partaken of Jesse's generosity. Thus, his treachery becomes even more deplorable than it would otherwise have been.

10. What does the balladeer do to make us feel pity for Jesse? --Among other things, the ballad mentions the mourning wife and children; it calls Jesse "poor"; it contrasts the living Jesse with the corpse ("But that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard / And laid poor Jesse in the grave").

11. Explain some of the things that you learn about Jesse from this ballad. Does some of what you learn seem to be historically accurate? Does some appear to be myth? Explain. --We learn that Jesse had killed many a man, that he had robbed the Glendale train, that it was Frank who robbed the Gallatin Bank, and so on. We also learn that he robbed the rich and gave to the poor. One might suspect that the robberies mentioned are verifiable. But Jesse's generosity and his invincibility (see last stanza) smack of myth.

Difficult

12. Using the material from the poem, write your own prose version of the life and death of Jesse James. --The student will find some difficulty in completing this assignment, for actually there is very little "story" (that is, chronologically arranged sequence of events) in the ballad. All we really knew from the ballad is that Jesse committed several crimes, was famous, retired under the name of Howard, and was shot by Robert Ford. This ballad forms an interesting contrast to the other two, in which the narrative thread is so clearcut and definite.

13. Which hero seems to be more realistic to you, Jesse James or Johnnie Armstrong? Why? Who is Mister Howard? Why is this name included in the ballad? --The student might answer that Jesse James seems more realistic, for, after all, every American is familiar with the lore of the West, while the outlaw chieftains of Scotland are remote, both in time and culturally. Mr. Howard, of course, is the pseudonym that Jesse adopted after he retired from the "outlaw trail." So far as the plot is concerned, the inclusion of the name is crucial, for it tells us that Jesse was in hiding; in fact, it tells us a good deal, even if we don't know the general outlines of James' actual biography.

14. Why do you think the balladeer does not tell us the reasons for the villain's actions? Can you guess those reasons? --We must remember that the balladeer was composing his work for a contemporary audience, people who would probably know in some detail the story of Jesse James. Their own knowledge of the "facts" could supply details of motivation and "story." The students might guess that Ford wanted the reward money, which, in fact, he did. But their imaginations can be given free rein in this question.

15. Can you find any examples of incremental repetition in "Jesse James"? Explain how they add to your understanding of the ballad. --Note the following stanzas: one ("But that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard / Has laid poor Jesse in the grave"); three (last two lines); seven, in which the "dirty little coward" is identified.

Assignment 5--Culminating assignments for the ballad unit

When you began the study of this unit, your teacher did not give you a definition of the ballad to memorize. Now that you have studied several ballads carefully from the standpoints of subject matter, form, and point of view, you should be able to identify several characteristics which, when put together, will serve as a reasonable definition and show whether or not you understand the ballad as a literary form. With this in mind, answer the following questions.

1. With what subject-matter does the ballad deal? --Almost any subject matter, provided that it will appeal to the audience for whom the ballad is intended, namely the people. It also concentrates on a single incident.

2. Does a ballad tell a complete story of a complete event, or does is tell a part of one episode which occurs quite close to the climax of an event? --See introductory material.

3. Is the vocabulary of the ballad difficult? Determine this by recalling your observations about the length of the words in the ballads you have read. Consider also the comparisons you made when examining the spelling of some words from older ballads. --Even though some ballads--in fact, a great many--are preserved in archaic language which the modern student might not readily understand, the ballads are essentially simple in their use of language. They tend to rely on everyday, not "poetic," language.

4. Is there much repetition of the same line or parts of lines in the ballad? --See introductory material, particularly the discussion of incremental repetition.

5. Is there much conversation in the ballads you have studied?

6. Is the balladeer ever a character in the ballad or does he tell about something that happened to others? --Of course, he uses the impersonal viewpoint of third person and thus is never--or very seldom--a character in his own ballad.

7. Are ballads ever sung? --Yes. Most of them were originally written with a melody in mind.

8. By using the answers to the above questions, write a definition of a ballad by completing the following statement: "A ballad is a song that ...." You may need to write several sentences. --See introductory material for a complete definition of the ballad. The student might formulate a definition such as this:

> A ballad is a song that tells of a single incident in the life of its main character. It is written in the language of everyday life, and it often employs repetition to advance and explain the story. The ballad frequently contains a good deal of dialogue, and the balladeer tells his story impersonally from the third person point of view.

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Recordings

The list of recordings provided below appears in the publication, *Resources for the Teaching of English*, prepared by the National Council of Teachers of English, 508 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois.

Verse: American

American History in Ballad and Song (Folkway) - Three 12" records. E. S. $17.85 ($12,75). Stock No. FH 5801.

American Negro Music from Slavery Times (Folkway) - One 12" lp record. Over 30 authentic slave songs sung by Michel LaRue. Documentary notes by Ralph Knight. E.S.C. $5.95 ($4.25). Stock No FH 5252.

Folk Music, U.S.A. (Folkway) - Two 12" lp records. 24 songs collected and edited by Harold Courlander and Moses Asch. S.C. $11.90 ($8.50). Stock No. FE 4530.

Who Built America (Folkway) - One 10" lp record. American history through folksongs sung by Bill Bonyun. E. $4.25 ($3.25). Stock No. FC 7402.

Verse: English

Early English Ballads (Folkway) - One 12", 33 1/3 rpm record. Text included. Read by Kathleen D. Read. S.C. $5.95 ($4.25). Stock No. FL 9881.

The following list of recordings appears in *Audio Visual Instructional Materials*, prepared by Educational Audio Visual, Inc., Pleasantville, New York. The catalogue is published yearly.

No. 234-2 *American Song Bag.* $5.95.

No. 351-1 *Flat Rock Ballads*. $5.95.

No. 189-4 *Anthology of Negro Poets in the U.S.A.* (Vol. 1). $5.95.

No. 189-5 *Anthology of Negro Poets in the U.S.A.* (Vol. 2). $5.95.

No. 4 13-1 *Ballads-Shakespeare-Johnson-Donne*. (Vol. 1). $5.95. "Sir Patrick Spens" is included in this album.

No. 402-4 *Burns-Scotch Border Ballads and Other Poems*. $5.95. This is an excellent collection which includes "Sir Patrick Spens", "Edward, Edward," and "The Wee Wee Man."

No. 402-6 *Scots Border Ballads*. $5.95.

No. 269-4 *British Broadside Ballads in Popular Tradition*. $5.95. These ballads are sung by Paul Clayton.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

THE LITERARY BALLAD--NARRATIVE POETRY

Literature Curriculum I

Teacher Version

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FOREWORD

The line between the traditional ballad and the literary or art ballad is thin indeed. Sometimes exact classification is almost impossible, but then exact classification of literary types is seldom expedient or desirable. Nonetheless, a great many poets--both well known and obscure--have adopted ballad subject matter and ballad form to tell their tales in their "literary ballads." But the literary ballad can be anonymous, as is the traditional ballad. For instance, we do not know who composed "Abdul Abulbul Amir," and yet we sense immediately that it is somehow--and in important ways--different from, say, "Sir Patrick Spens." The quality that characterizes the literary ballad might, for lack of a better word, be called sophistication; a work such as "The Highwayman" or "Danny Deever" simply evidences a different kind of artistry from that which we find in the folk or traditional ballad. Nor should we assume here any particular scale of values: "The Highwayman" is different from "Johnnie Armstrong," but not necessarily better.

Specifically, the literary ballad is likely to employ "literary" language. The beginning of "The Highwayman" with its studied figures of speech would never be mistaken for part of a traditional ballad. In speech and composition, the literary ballad tends to be more obviously the product of craftsmanship than does the traditional ballad. And since the literary ballad is in most instances intended for reading, not singing, its meter is likely to be more regular than that of its folk counterpart, which could rely upon the "meter" of the tune to reinforce its rhythm.

These generalizations hold true for most literary ballads, but not all. Any student of literature does well to avoid th temptation to construct neat, air-tight compartments. Insofar as classifications aid one to understand and appreciate, they are valuable; insofar as they become an end in themselves, they are destructive.

The fact that conscious and highly sophisticated literary craftsmen such as Alfred Noyes and Rudyard Kipling turn to the age-old ballad devices to achieve their effects says much about the basic appeal of the ballad form. The ballad stanza, for instance, is a nice combination of diversity in simplicity that literally catches the ear with the characteristic alternation of four-stress and three-stress lines and the ABCB rhyme scheme. But not all of the poems in this unit employ the traditional ballad stanza. "The Highwayman," for instance, does not. If we were here concerned about terminology, we might argue that Noyes' poem is merely a narrative, not a ballad. But actually, the word "ballad" like the word "lyric" has becomes almost a catch-all. In fact, a ballad is virtually any narrative poem.

I. "The Highwayman," Alfred Noyes (in Story Poems, pp. 96-100)

Explication

A young highwayman uses the shades of night to conceal his rendezvous with the girl he loves. But the wind's "torrent of darkness" does not prevent Tim, the ostler, from hearing the highwayman promise Bess, the landlord's daughter, that he will return after he has obtained the prize of yellow gold. Tim, who loves Bess himself but cannot hope for her love in return, reveals the highwayman's plan to King George's men. The troops, eager for a prize, go to the inn, drink copiously of the ale, gag the landlord's daughter, and await the highwayman's return. At the stroke of midnight of the following day, Bess hears the sound of horses' hoofs and knows that her lover is returning. In order to warn him, she pulls the trigger on the musket which the King's men had tied beneath her breast. The highwayman hears the shot and rides back into the West. When dawn comes, he learns that Bess gave her life to save him. He rides back to seek revenge, but is shot down "like a dog on the highway" by the same redcoats who awaited his coming.

The subject-matter of this literary ballad is certainly typical of that of many traditional ballads. Love, courage, loyalty, revenge, and treachery are woven into the romantic tale, demanding a rich response from the reader.

Much seems to be wrong with the world of the highwayman. Those from whom we expect goodness show themselves to be evil. The redcoats, men in the service of the king, are the blackest of cowards. They steal the landlord's provisions; they mistreat the beautiful Bess. Many against one, they shoot the highwayman as he returns to seek revenge. The highwayman, the enemy of law and order, elicits the sympathy of the reader because of the gallantry he displays when speaking with Bess and because of the courage he displays at the conclusion of the ballad. Given a chance to save his own life, he chooses to ride back to face the murderers of the girl he loved. Tim, who claims to love Bess, shows how little he understands love, for it was his treacherous act that brought about the tragedy. Bess, the representative of the weaker sex, meets cowardice with courage. Indeed, the highwayman's world is a paradox.

Alfred Noyes constructed "The Highwayman" according to the tradition of the popular ballad, using some aspects sparingly and enhancing others with the language and poetic devices of a more sophisticated society. Inextricably woven into this ballad is a most intricate use of repetition. Repetition is the key to its structure and the secret of its effectiveness. Incremental repetition (repetition of a preceding stanza or part of a stanza with a variation that advances the narrative) occurs in the fourth and fifth lines or in the fourth, fifth, and sixth lines of every stanza. Some memorable examples are as follows:

"Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

A redcoat troop came marching-
Marching - marching
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

A more subtle use of incremental repetition is employed by the poet in Part I, stanza I, and in Part II, stanza X, and produces a weird, supernatural atmosphere in the conclusion of the poem. The balladeer tells the reader that:

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
And the highwayman came riding -
Riding - riding -
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

Later, the present tense is used, intensifying the reader's involvement.

When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
A highwayman comes riding -
Riding - riding -
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Another kind of repetition involves the setting. The moonlight, appearing in nine of the seventeen stanzas, weaves its silver ribbon through the narrative, forming a pattern against which all action is performed. The highwayman rides by moonlight; he promises to return to Bess by moonlight; he kisses her hair in the moonlight. In Part I, then, the moon is gentle and kind--a promise of love. In Part II, the moon is the helpmate of the treacherous. As the redcoats wait in the darkness of the inn, the road along which the highwayman is to ride is turned into a silver ribbon, a silver spot-light, silhouetting the young outlaw. The moonlight creeps into the inn, lighting Bess's face and shining on the musket as she pulls the trigger and warns him with her death.

Dialogue is used sparingly. The outlaw speaks once, and is allowed only one stanza, but repetition of his thoughts advances the narrative. The redcoats echo the words of the outlaw, "Watch for me by moonlight" when they tell Bess to "...keep good watch." Again the words of the outlaw echo in the girl's mind and motivate her action.

A final effective use of repetition is seen in the use of the same end words in lines four and five in each stanza.

Like the traditional ballad, "The Highwayman" deals with a single episode. Much is left to the imagination of the reader. Even the name of the outlaw is withheld, and his life up to the incident described is a mystery. How long had he known Bess? Did they plan to leave together when he returned with his prize of gold? Where was the landlord during the episode related? Did the soldiers bind him, too, or did he flee in terror when they approached? Where did the treacherous Tim go when the soldiers came? What kind of love was his that he would permit the redcoats to mistreat Bess whom he claimed to love?

Unlike the traditional ballad, "The Highwayman" is rich in figurative language. Metaphor and onomatopoeia are particularly worthy of note. "The wind was a torrent of darkness," "The moon was a ghostly galleon," "The road was a ribbon of moonlight," are splendid examples of metaphor (what we might agree to define as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance, as "The moon was a ghostly galleon"). "Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard," and "The horse-hoofs ringing clear" are examples of onomatopoeia (a figure of speech in which the sound of the word is like the sound made by the object or action described).

Noyes is particularly successful in bringing vivid images to the mind of his reader by appealing to the senses. The outlaw's brilliant costume, his whistling a tune to the window, his rising upright in his stirrups elicit a reaction from the reader as each sense responds to a vivid image. Here the writer of the literary ballad gives much fuller coverage than the balladeer of old. Figurative language and the use of imagery (reproduction of a mental picture of anything not actually present to the senses) are aspects of form apparent in "The Highwayman" which make it an excellent example of a literary ballad.

Although the point of view is essentially the same as noted in the traditional ballad, Noyes, in this literary ballad, reveals his attitudes and feeling about the subject by the selection and arrangement of his images and the effective use of figurative language and descriptive detail. Nature, for example, is pictured in an angry humor; the wind is a torrent; the moon is a ghostly galleon; the seas are cloudy. The reader senses the poet's attitude through his description of nature. Noyes is telling someone else's story, but he is certainly showing how he feels about the people involved.

Questions and Activities

Although "The Highwayman" is not a difficult poem for seventh grade students the tale is quite involved and the form of the poem is worthy of careful study. The first assignments concern subject matter. Question 1 allows for a thorough reading of the poem. Question 2 should alert students to the descriptive power of the poet's words and should develop accurate and thoughtful reading. This assignment can be implemented in many ways. Perhaps the phrases could be flashed one at a time on an overhead projector so that students could be called upon individually or collectively. Perhaps a contest could be planned. The method is not of major importance so long as the result is the student's awareness of the descriptive power of words and an increased realization of the need for careful reading. Words and phrases needed for Question 2 are as follows:

(1) torrent of darkness (wind)
(2) gusty (trees)
(3) ghostly galleon (moon)
(4) cloudy (seas)
(5) ribbon of moonlight (road)
(6) purple (moor)
(7) bunch of lace (highwayman)
(8) claret velvet (coat)
(9) brown doe-skin (breeches)
(10) a-twinkle (pistol-butts)
(11) black-eyed (Bess)
(12) long black (hair)
(13) white and peaked (Tim's face)
(14) hollows of madness (Tim's eyes)
(15) mouldy hay (Tim's hair)
(16) red-lipped (Bess)
(17) Dumb as a dog (Tim)
(18) bonny (Bess)
(19) black cascade (Bess's hair)
(20) sweet black waves (Bess's hair)
(21) gypsy's ribbon (road)
(23) blood red (spurs)
(24) velvet (coat)
(25) like a dog (highwayman)
(26) riding (highwayman)
(27) clattered and clashed (highwayman)
(28) locked and barred (inn)
(29) whistled (highwayman)
(30) waiting (Bess)
(31) creaked (gate)
(32) listened (Tim)
(33) watch for me (highwayman)
(34) upright in the stirrup (highwayman)
(35) tugged at his rein (highwayman)
(36) galloped away to the West (highwayman)
(37) marching (redcoats)
(38) drank his ale (redcoats)
(39) knelt at her casement (Bess)
(40) sniggering jest (redcoats)
(41) blank and bane (road)
(42) shrieking a curse to the sky

Easy

1. Carefully read "The Highwayman." Make certain that you understand the story. Your teacher will explain anything that you do not understand. Be prepared to read the ballad aloud. --For a synopsis, see explication.

2. This poem paints very clear pictures of people and places. In his mind's eye, the reader can see the highwayman, the inn, Bess, and the redcoats. Your teacher has selected a number of words, phrases, and clauses which describe the appearance of certain people or places in the poem or which tell the actions of the people involved. Can you connect these words, phrases, and clauses with the correct person or thing?

3. In your own words, briefly tell or write the story of "The Highwayman."

4. List the last words of each line in stanzas I to VI and join with a curved line the words which rhyme. Notice the pattern. --The student should see immediately that the poem is not written in the ballad stanza.

5. What do you observe about the last word in the fourth and fifth line of each stanza? -- Of course, they are the same word, illustrating one of the many kinds of repetition characteristic of the ballad in particular and of narrative poetry in general.

Medium

6. Why did the redcoats bind a musket at the girl's breast? -- We are not sure of the answer to this question. Apparently they did it to terrify her and to cow her into submission. If this is the case, the effort was unsuccessful, for Bess's heroism rose above the ploys of the soldiers.

7. Do the characters in "The Highwayman" seem "real" to you? Explain. -- This question can go as deep as we want to push it. In Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster presents a brilliant but fairly concise discussion of why characters do or do not seem real (that is, whether or not they are verisimilar). The rule of thumb is that characters which achieve verisimilitude act as we would expect them to act on the basis of their motivations in the work and on the basis of what the author has told us about them. The question, then, is this: do Bess and the highwayman act as we might reasonably expect them to? In order to answer it, we must consider Bess's deep love, the highwayman's valor, and the situation in which they find themselves.

8. When the highwayman heard that Bess had sacrificed her life to save him, he turned back to seek revenge. What kind of person does this show him to be? -- The highwayman is, of course, a man of tremendous personal valor. He also adheres strictly to his own "code" of loyalty and honor. You might find it profitable to have the students compare the highwayman to Johnnie Armstrong. They will find great similarities of character in the two.

9. Sir Patrick Spens and his men sacrificed their lives for their king. Bess sacrificed her life for the man she loved. Which sacrifice demanded the greater courage? Were both sacrifices made for love? -- The question about courage is moot, but the students might achieve some insights by thinking briefly about the nature of courage as expressed in "Sir Patrick Spens" and "The Highwayman." Bess was motivated by love. Sir Patrick apparently was motivated by loyalty to his king. (One might even say that Sir Patrick displayed a kind of blind loyalty.)

10. In stanza five, you will find a good example of one of the characteristic devices of the balladeer. What is that device? Explain. - - Obviously, the stanza is characterized by incremental repetition: "Then look for me by moonlight, / Watch for me by moonlight: / I'll come to thee by moonlight."

11. The dialogue is limited in this ballad. Where do you find any? How does the poet use the words of the highwayman so that there appears to be more dialogue in the poem then there actually is? -- See stanza nine.

12. Explain why you think a metrical pattern and perhaps rhyme are important in a poem. -- The basic answer to this question is obviously that rhyme and meter are pleasurable. Readers and listeners respond to the "music" of poetry. Class discussion might stumble onto some valid insights into why this is so. In any case, the students ought to recognize that somehow rhyme and meter add to the beauty of the poem and hence to the pleasure that one derives from it. Indeed, even virtual nonsense is highly pleasurable as long as it has "music":

Hickory dickory dock,
The mouse ran up the clock;
The clock struck one,
And down he run;
Hickory dickory dock.

or

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

In connection with this question, you might like to have the students read "Jabberwocky" in its entirety (Immortal Poems, p. 448).

13. Is the author of this poem telling about something that happened to himself? Do you know how the poet feels about the king's men, the highwayman, and Bess? Explain. -- The poem, of course, is written from the third person point of view, and the author does not participate in the action. The author scrupulously avoids telling us directly how he feels about any of his characters. But his point of view (that is, his attitude toward his materials, in other words, the tone of his work) is obvious. He shows clearly that the redcoats are cowardly bullies, that Bess is most desirable in all ways, and that the highwayman has a certain nobility that redeems him from the odiousness of his profession. The student can indicate many specific ways in which Noyes portrays the characters and thus shows his attitude toward them.

Difficult

14. How do you think King George's men knew about the plan of the highwayman? -- This question gets at one of the crucial elements of the plot of the poem. We recall that Tim overheard the conversation between Bess and her lover; obviously, he became an informer. (See stanza four.) You might point out to the students that Noyes here uses one of the characteristic devices of the ballad, that is, implication. On the basis of implication, the reader must guess that Tim was the informer. Indeed, if Tim was not the informer, the whole logic of the poem crumbles. What is Tim's function in the work, if not to serve as the agent of tragedy?

15. What happened to the landlord himself? What happened to Tim? -- We don't really know, nor do we need to know. The ballad is unified around the relationship of Bess and the highwayman. Bess's father enters only by the way, and Tim's function is that explained in the preceding question. Some students might discover that Noyes would have ruined the unity of his poem if he had added details about the fate of the landlord and Tim.

16. Ask your teacher to explain metaphor and onomatopoeia. Can you find examples of these two devices in the poem? (By the way, how long do you think it would take you to remember the spelling of onomatopoeia? Do you think it's important that you know how to spell it?) -- Metaphor is such a central concept of literature that any attempt at an abbreviated discussion would be both destructive and futile. Any good dictionary will give an

adequate definition of onomatopoeia. The first stanza of the poem is an excellent example of the use of metaphor and should provide the student with material that will reinforce his understanding of this basic concept.

17. What similarities and dissimilarities in form do you see in this ballad and "Johnnie Armstrong"? Do you find any other similarities or dissimilarities? -- The most obvious dissimilarity is in stanza form. "Johnnie Armstrong" is in the ballad stanza. "The Highwayman" rhymes AABCCB, and it scans roughly like this:

    /   /   /   /   /   /
The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,
    /   /   /   /   /   /
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
    /   /   /   /   /   /
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
       /   /   /
And the highwayman came riding -
    /   /
    Riding - Riding -
    /   /   /   /   /   /
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door.

The students might see that another difference between the two poems is the general disparity between a traditional and a literary ballad. (See introductory material.) Both ballads deal with the betrayal of an essentially noble robber. The students will undoubtedly find other points of comparison.

18. Look up the meaning of the word "theme." You will find several definitions but one of them applies to an element of all literary works. Can you determine which one that is? Have your teacher discuss the meaning of "theme" in a work of literature with you. Do "Johnnie Armstrong," "Jesse James," and "The Highwayman" all have a similar theme? In your own words, could you state that theme? - - The theme of a work of literature is its subject, but not necessarily its story. Thus, the theme of "Johnnie Armstrong," "Jesse James," and "The Highwayman" concerns betrayal. They are all stories about characters, but they are also stories about an idea or a concept. That idea or concept is their theme. Students might answer, simply, something like this: "The theme that the three ballads have in common is betrayal." You might find it interesting to have students speculate about the themes of other works that they have read. For instance, we surely can say that one theme of "The Price of the Head" is salvation and that one theme of "Bishop Hatto" is a kind of justice.

II. "Danny Deever," Rudyard Kipling

Explication

This literary ballad employs many techniques of the traditional ballad. Constant dialogue between Files-on-Parade and the Color-Sergeant reveals the basic dramatic element in the poem, their human reaction to the ceremonial hanging of Danny Deever. Another story, Danny Deever's past and present, is developed through the last four lines of each stanza. These lines, a form of incremental repetition, move the story from one scene to the next. Thus, through the dialogue in the first four lines and the narrative account in the last four lines of each stanza, a two-fold drama ensues. Consider, for example, how the dialogue in the first four lines of stanza one immediately establishes the inward fear of the Color-Sergeant:

> "What are the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.
> "To turn you out, to turn you out," the Color-Sergeant said.
> "What makes you look so white, so white?" said
>   Files-on-Parade.
> "I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch," the Color-
>   Sergeant said.

Choice of specific and limited detail in the first stanza as well as in the other three stanzas contributes significantly to the drama of the ballad. Irrelevant as particulars, they become quite important in the total picture. Details mentioned in the last four lines of stanza one lucidly sum up Danny Deever's disgrace:

> "They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away,
> "An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'."

In like manner, the mere mention of particular music in line five of the same stanza quite clearly establishes the seriousness of the occasion:

> "For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the
>   Dead March play."

Stanza two presents enough detail through dialogue to stimulate the reader's imagination about human behavior. The Color-Sergeant plays down the genuine feeling many of the nine hundred assembled must have felt during the sad ceremony. The real basis for soldiers breathing hard, feeling chills, and fainting is Danny Deever's impending death. But the Color-Sergeant attempts to blame it on other causes perhaps because he feels somewhat guilty himself:

"What makes the rear-rank breathe so 'ard?" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's bitter cold, it's bitter cold," the Color-Sergeant said.
"What makes that front-rank man fall down?" said Files-on-Parade.
"A touch o' sun, a touch o' sun," the Color-Sergeant said.

The refrain (last four lines of stanza two) not only prepares for the next scene (stanza three) but provides some insight as to why Danny Deever will hang :

"They 'ave 'alted Danny Deever by 'is coffin on the ground;
"An' 'e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin', shootin' hound--"

The picture of Danny Deever's crime is completed in the last four lines of the next stanza (stanza three). The dialogue in this stanza dramatically shows the relationship of Danny Deever to Files-on-Parade. They were typical soldiers of the regiment as their very names suggest.

The opening dialogue in stanza four describes the hanging, and it suggests that Danny's soul will forever suffer torment. Lines six, seven, and eight further clarify the regiment's dread of this experience:

"The Regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us away;
"Ho!" the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer today,
"After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!"

He had been one of the regiment, sharing their way of life; and, necessary as it was, all of the soldiers present were part of the occasion, and, in this sense, somewhat responsible for the hanging.

The ballad's rhythm of seven uniform stresses to a line helps develop a mood of orderliness and seriousness of purpose which is further enhanced by the uniform length of each line and the orderly pattern of rhyme. An image of military personnel standing in formation, line after line, can easily be envisioned.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. Why was Danny Deever hanged? -- He shot a sleeping comrade. See the refrain of stanza three and also the refrain of stanza two.

2. Point out phrases which show the reaction of Files-on-Parade to Danny's hanging. -- For instance, Files-on-Parade points out that Danny had the cot next to his and that he had shared beer with Danny many times. The implication is that he and Danny knew each other extremely well.

3. Does the Cockney speech add to or detract from the poem? -- Some students will have difficulty in understanding the dialogue. Nonetheless, they ought to see that the Cockney dialect adds to the characterization of the people in the poem. The work would definitely lose color if it were written in standard British English.

4. Does Files-on-Parade know Danny well? How do you know? -- See question two.

5. In your own words, briefly tell or write the story of "Danny Deever." -- For a synopsis, see explication.

Medium

6. What is the reason for removing the buttons and stripes from Danny's uniform? -- Even the student unfamiliar with military customs should guess that this is a ceremony which symbolizes the disgrace of a soldier. It is the military organization's way of disavowing any further connection with the malefactor, the supposition being that insignia of regiment and rank are signs of honor, which the dishonored soldier is unfit to wear.

7. What background information about Danny's life can you gather from the poem? -- Very little indeed. We can assume that his life has been on a social par with that of his comrades, and we know, of course, that he has killed a man. But the poem keeps a sharp focus on the action at hand; it does not concern itself with peripheral material. This kind of focus is typical of ballads.

8. Who is responsible for hanging Danny Deever? -- His regiment.

9. Does this ballad contain incremental repetition? Examples? -- The refrains are excellent examples of incremental repetition: "For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the dead march play," "They are hangin' Danny Deever, they are marchin' of 'im around," and so on.

10. How many people are talking in this poem? Who are they? -- We hear three "voices," that of Files-on-Parade, that of the

Color-Sergeant, and that of the unidentified speaker of the refrain. The students might speculate about the identity of the speaker of the refrain.

11. Point out some of the ways in which the poet increases the terror of what happens to Danny. -- He shows the reaction of the spectators and thereby increases the effect of the scene. He tells us that Danny must walk past his own coffin. We discover all sorts of details, such as the playing of the dead march and the divestment of rank and insignia.

Difficult

12. Why do you suppose that Files-on-Parade says that Danny's soul is whimpering as it passes overhead? -- This question is actually moot. Does the soul whimper because it is stained with sin? Or is the soul merely symbolic of the terror that Danny has undergone? In this connection, the word "whimpers" is crucial. The student should think of the meaning of the word and perhaps explain the circumstances in which a man might whimper. In any case, we can be certain that Kipling intends us to feel deeply the horror of the situation as well as Danny's terror. Without fail, someone will answer that the soul whimpers because it is condemned for its crime; however, it is probably dubious that Kipling intends such a meaning. By and large, the sensitive reader must feel pity for Danny.

13. Look at the ballad again. How many stories are being told at the same time? Which section of the poem handles each story? -- We can say with certainty that the poem concentrates upon a single action. Nonetheless, we do see that action from diverse points of view. We learn of the reaction of the three speakers and through them of the reaction of the regiment. The most direct and simple answer to the question is that the poem demonstrates the unity typical of the ballad form, that is, it concentrates very sharply on the single action that it narrates.

14. What is the rhythm pattern of the poem? -- The scansion of the poem patterns thus:

/ / / / / /
"What are the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.
/ / / / / / /
"To turn you out, to turn you out," the Color-Sergeant said.
/ / / / / / /
"What makes you look so white, so white?" said Files-on-Parade.
/ / / / / / /
"I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch," the Color-Sergeant said.

We ought to remember, however, that scansion presents a general pattern; it does not provide a blueprint for the reading of the poem.

15. Do you notice anything interesting in the way the poem is typed on the page? -- The student should immediately see the refrain. In this connection, see questions nine and ten.

16. How many different attitudes toward Danny's death are presented in this poem? For instance, is the Color-Sergeant's reaction different from that of Files-on-Parade? If so, why? -- We get three attitudes. (See questions nine and ten.) The Color-Sergeant is apparently the seasoned veteran who answers the questions of the naive Files-on-Parade. Files-on-Parade's attitude is one of wonder, almost morbid curiosity. He simply does not understand the ramifications of the event. The Color-Sergeant does understand and is revolted by the spectacle, but he stoically does his duty. Note how this effect emerges from the question-answer nature of the poem.

17. Can you tell what the poet's attitude to Danny Deever's death is? How would you go about describing his attitude? -- The student might guess offhand that we see the poet's attitude in the refrain, but such is most emphatically not the case. In order to understand the poet's attitude (or point of view), we must differentiate between poet and narrator. In telling his story, the poet can choose any sort of stance that he thinks will best serve his purpose. Thus, when we speak of the narrator in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, we recognize that Benjy, the feeble-minded narrator, is not William Faulkner the author, but the person that Faulkner chooses to speak. The narrator who speaks in the refrain of "Danny Deever" is not Kipling, but someone whom Kipling has created to speak for him. This "narrator" is decidedly cold-blooded. Notice that all the pity comes from the two principal speakers, while the narrator objectively reports; in fact, he levies an unfavorable judgment on Danny: "An' 'e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin' shootin' hound." This relationship among the three speakers should offer a good many possibilities for thought and discussion on the part of the students. Certainly much of the effect of the poem derives from the tension between the narrator's attitude and that of the other speakers.

18. Ask your teacher to explain the meaning of "figures of speech" to you. Do you find any figures of speech in "Danny Deever"? -- In stanza three, for instance, the Color-Sergeant says, "E's drinkin' bitter beer alone." This down-to-earth figure of speech aptly and poignantly characterizes the loneliness and bitterness of Danny's death. (The figure is, of course, a metaphor.) Danny's soul is personified in stanza four.

19. Look up the meaning of "paradox." Discuss the meaning of the word with your teacher. Can you find a paradox in the second stanza of the poem? Can you explain it? -- A paradox is a statement or situation that is seemingly or actually self-contradictory. In stanza two we have the paradox of some soldiers breathing hard in the cold and some fainting with the heat. This paradox, of course, is the Color-Sergeant's way of explaining the emotional reaction of the regiment. Actually, the soldiers are responding neither to heat nor to cold, but to the horror of the hanging. Might the sergeant have said something like this: "The whole business makes their blood run cold, and some of them simply cannot stand it"? The apparently matter-of-fact answer is typical of the stoical attitude of the Color-Sergeant.

III. "Abdul Abulbul Amir," author unknown (in Story Poems, pp. 331-333)

Explication

Most children from a generation other than the present knew and loved to sing this rousing poem. It has been so popular that it has virtually become a part of the folk heritage, and yet it is clearly marked by certain characteristics of the literary.

The story is relatively simple. The bravest of all the Sultan's men is Abdul Abulbul Amir; he is called on whenever the armies need a particularly valiant man. The czar's bravest and most famous hero is Ivan Petrofsky Skovar (in some versions, Ivan Skavinsky Skovar). Ivan is not only a brave soldier, but a real man of the world; he can imitate Irving (presumably tell stories as well as Washington Irving), tell fortunes, and play the guitar -- a thoroughly accomplished fellow. One day Ivan decides to walk downtown and quite by chance runs into that other hero, Abdul. Abdul, either by chance or purposely, steps on Ivan's toe, and, of course, there is no alternative but to fight. They attack with might and main, and, ironically, kill one another. That, in substance, is the story.

Further and relatively detailed explication will be found in the suggested answers to the questions concerning the poem.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. What are the nationalities of the two main characters in the poem? How do you know? -- Abdul is either a Turk or an Arab (he serves the sultan), and Ivan is a Russian (he serves the czar). The names also provide a clue.

2. What brought on the fight? -- See explication and also stanza six.

3. In your own words, briefly tell or write the story of "Abdul Abulbul Amir." -- See explication.

4. Who is the Prophet? (See stanza one.) -- Mohammed.

5. Do you notice anything in the rhyming of this poem that is different from the rhyme of the other poems that you have read? (Look very carefully at these lines: "When they wanted a man to encourage the van, / Or harass the foe from the rear, / Storm fort or redoubt, they were sure to call out / For Abdul Abulbul Amir." Underline all the rhyming words in the lines.) -- The poem has internal rhyme, thus: man-van, redoubt-out.

6. Does the last stanza remind you of any other ballad? Explain. -- The Muscovite maiden keeping her vigil reminds one of "Sir Patrick Spens," in which the ladies wait for the return of the Scots lords.

7. Look up the meanings of all unfamiliar words.

8. What appeals to you most about the poem? -- Some students at least should respond immediately that the rousing meter of the poem is appealing. It is a highly musical piece of writing that should be read aloud. Some students (or the teacher) may know the tune.

9. Be prepared to read the poem aloud.

Medium

10. What main characteristics can you see that differentiate this "literary ballad" from the traditional ballads that you have read? -- The stanzas of the poem are very much like those of most ballads, with four stressed syllables in the first and third lines and three stressed syllables in the second and fourth. Most ballads, however, do not rhyme the first and third lines, but some do: the ballad stanza is a relatively flexible form. However, the traditional ballad, as we have seen, shows less sophistication than the literary ballad. "Abdul Abulbul Amir" is, after all, a relatively sophisticated piece of work. Note the sophistication of the language: "unaccustomed to fear," "harass the foe," "the cream of the Muscovite guards," and so on. As we have seen, the traditional ballad, intended as it was to be sung, did

not need such a clearly marked metrical pattern as does the literary ballad; thus, typically, "Abdul Abulbul Amir" is more regular in meter than many traditional ballads, and that meter is more pronounced.

11. In the ballad, who died and how?--See explication. The poem is a bit obscure about the fate of the two heroes, but careful reading reveals that they killed each other. (The sultan arrives just as Abdul is dying, and someone, presumably the sultan's man, throws the corpse of Ivan into the Danube.) See stanzas eight, nine, and ten.

12. Your teacher has explained to you the meaning of figure of speech. Can you find at least one figure of speech in the poem?--For instance, stanza four: Ivan was the cream of the Muscovite guard (a metaphor). You might ask your students what it means. What is the similarity between Ivan and cream (that is, how does the metaphor function)?

13. Using the rhyme and meter of the original, rewrite the last three stanzas so that everything in the poem is explained to your satisfaction. You may add additional stanzas if you choose.--The object of this exercise is to give the students the pleasure and imaginative experience of composing some poetry. It is also aimed at increasing their understanding of the fairly obscure outcome of the poem.

Difficult

14. What sort of man is Ivan? Explain.--See explication. We find that Ivan is a man of the world and a dandy. He plays the guitar and tells fortunes, and he is a good story teller. But he is also intensely proud; he cannot brook the "insult" of having Adbul step on his toe. Some students might point out that Ivan, in a modern frame of reference at least, is an extremely foolish man.

15. Explain stanza ten.--The problem is the "sack" that the stanza mentions. Apparently Ivan's body was stuffed in a sack and hrown into the river, but the poem does not give us enough information that we can be certain.

16. Is the poem serious or humorous or a mixture? Explain.--Certainly the poem does not contain the pathos of other ballads in this unit. On the other hand, it is not directly humorous. Perhaps it can be characterized best as "rousing." We

have the feeling, certainly, that the author's point of view towards his subject is not one of high seriousness, and thus the poem does not have a serious tone.

17. Does the poem imply a value system? Explain. --We probably don't take "Abdul Abulbul Amir" seriously enough to feel that it implies a weighty system of values. Nonetheless, we know that Ivan values honor above life, for Abdul in stepping on his toe had insulted him. The value system of the poem, then, is only pseudo-serious.

18. Ask your teacher to explain the meaning of "satire." Are there any elements of satire in the poem? --Satire: holding human foibles, weaknesses, and follies up to ridicule. (This definition, by the way, is only partial.) The poem definitely ridicules both Abdul and Ivan. In effect, the poem says, "What folly to die for a cause so slight."

19. What is the author's attitude toward his subject? Explain how you know.--The point of view of the work is mild amusement. The author makes little effort, except in the last stanzas, to show the futility of what happened, nor does he attempt to build any great sympathy for the two main characters. Even the last two stanzas do very little to deepen the emotional impact of the poem. Compare the emotional nature of "Abdul Abulbul Amir" with that of other ballads.

20. Look up the meaning of the word "honor." Discuss this meaning with your teacher. What part does "honor" play in the poem?--The concept of honor is important to the poem, in that Ivan enters the fight since he feels that his honor has been hurt. The student should see immediately that Ivan's reaction is based on a kind of false, or at least highly superficial, honor.

IV. "The Springhill Disaster"

Explication

In "The Springhill Disaster," modern balladeers Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger ally themselves with the writers of the traditional ballad. Like so many early ballads, a disaster provides the subject--here a terrible mine disaster in Spring Hill, Nova Scotia. On October 23, 1958, the people of Spring Hill (population about 8,000) were shaken by a tragedy that brought death to seventy-four and injured seventeen (although the ballad implies twelve). The injured miners were rescued after eight days of entombment.

MacColl and Seeger follow the traditional ballad form very closely. The language is that of the common people--simple, uncluttered, undecorated. The weight of the tragedy is such that traditional ballad techniques are sufficient to elicit sympathy. The earth appears as the antagonist, restless and angry and sunless. Man plays the role of the victim--uneasy, sleepless, waiting for the earth above him to tremble and roll. Like the ballads of old, many questions are left unanswered; an episode rather than the whole disaster is presented. What caused the disaster? Who were the victims? Were the bodies of all the dead found? Only the essentials are related.

The leaping and lingering found in traditional ballads such as "Sir Patrick Spens" is evident is stanzas three and four. All of stanza three and three lines of stanza four dwell on the setting and only hint at the disaster which closes round "The living and dead men two miles down." A refrain completes each stanza. Incremental repetition occurs frequently as in lines one and two of stanzas one, two, and three. Another example is apparent in lines one and two of stanza five. Dialogue does not appear in the ballad until stanza six when Caleb Rushton, assuming leadership, says, "There's no more water or light or bread/ So we'll live on song and hope instead." The dialogue is important because we see man become heroic when tragedy strikes. Spirit rises above flesh. Song and hope will keep the miners alive. The ballad stops briefly, in a sense, as the narrators interrupt Caleb Rushton and define the "hope." "Listen for the shouts of the bareface miners," the narrator says. "Listen through the rubble for a rescue team." Hope, then, is not in bread and water, but in fellow human beings. The ballad ends abruptly. Some were rescued; the others were left in the grave they helped to build.

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. Below is a list of historical events with which you may be familiar. Can you think of a heading which would serve to show what all of these events have in common? Can you, in other words, classify these events under one, all-inclusive term?

The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (79 A.D.)
The sinking of the Titanic (1912)
The London Fire (1666)
The San Francisco Earthquake (1906)

The Mississippi Flood (1937)
The Santo Domingo Hurricane (1930)
--All of the historical events listed are disasters.

2. In your own words, briefly tell or write the story of "The Springhill Disaster."

3. Your teacher may ask you to sing this ballad. Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger composed both the words and the music. By singing the ballad, you will find that you are much better able to appreciate the total work.

4. In stanza one, what are "the roads that never saw sun nor sky"?--The "roads" are the tunnels of the mine.

Medium

5. "Sir Patrick Spens" tells of a sea disaster. "The Avondale Mine Disaster" tells of a mine tragedy which took place in Avondale, Pennsylvania; "The Titanic" tells of a tragedy at sea which took 1,513 lives. From this small sampling what can you conclude about the subject matter of some ballads? In one sentence state the subject matter of "The Springhill Disaster." What conclusion can you draw about the suitability of the ballad form for this particular subject? If you were asked to write a poem about one of the historical events in Assignment 1, do you think you would be wise to choose the ballad form? Why? Maybe you would like to write a ballad about one of the events in Assignment 1. Your ballad need not be long. Two stanzas of four lines each would be sufficient.--Ballads tend to deal with serious subject matter, frequently tragedy. To be sure, there are humorous ballads, but they are far outnumbered by the serious. The student might say something like this: "The subject of the poem is a mine cave-in that occurred in 1958." Of course, one cannot dogmatize about statements of subject; there are a great many possibilities. For answers to the rest of the questions in number five, the students should improvise freely. Their discussion ought to get near to discovery of why the ballad form is so popular. Also, the students should enjoy composing their own ballads. Point out to them that they can use a good deal of freedom, both in form and matter.

6. Read the ballad carefully once more. Then answer the following questions:

Where did the disaster take place?
When did the disaster take place?
What caused the disaster?
What kind of mineral was being mined?
What was the name of the mine?
How many were trapped in the mine?
Were the bodies of all the dead found?
How many were saved?
How was the rescue made?
What happened to the mines after the disaster?
What happened to those who were rescued?

You undoubtedly found that some of these questions cannot be answered. The ones that can, contain only the essential facts: when, where, what. If you consider this to be a typical ballad, what can you conclude about the use of details in the ballad? Did you come to a similar conclusion when you studied "Sir Patrick Spens" in the unit on the traditional ballad?--The answers to these questions are obvious.

7. Are there any words in this ballad which you had to look up in the dictionary? If you recall the simple language of the other ballads you have studied, what conclusion can you draw about the typical language employed by the balladeer?--Most students probably understood all the words. Like traditional ballads, the diction of this poem is simple.

8. Do the authors express their feelings about the disaster? What can you say is the typical point of view of the balladeer? --Not directly. The typical point of view is impersonal.

9. Does this ballad seem more "modern" to you than some of the others? Explain why?--Obviously, it deals with a "modern" subject, a mine disaster. The language is also modern.

Difficult

10. Do you think that the authors might have had a social or political reason for composing their work? Explain. --The student might guess that the ballad can be and is frequently an instrument of propaganda. Certainly "The Springhill Disaster" is, in part at least, a ballad of protest against the conditions in which miners must work and also a plea for reform.

11. Do you find any irony in the last stanza? Explain. --The bitter irony is that the miners had literally been digging their own grave. That is, they were entombed in the mine that they helped to dig.

12. The word "grave" in the last stanza of the poem plays a very important part in the work. Why? Does "grave" have several meanings in the poem?-- Explain. How many references to graves are there in the poem?--The mine itself is a grave, actually a living grave, the poets imply. At the end, it becomes a literal grave. In stanza three we find, "But it's dark as the grave in the Cumberland mine"; stanza five, "Long hot days in a miner's tomb"; stanza eight, "Through all their lives they dug their grave."

V. "The Quarry," W.H. Auden

Explication

On first reading, "The Quarry" appears to be a simple narrative poem in ballad form. In the first eight stanzas, the action develops by means of questions and answers:

> O what is that sound which so thrills the ear
> Down in the valley drumming, drumming?
> Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,
> The soldiers coming.

Obviously a woman asks the questions, and a man answers them. The first three stanzas reveal that the woman is interested in the soldiers and what they are doing, while the man gives matter-of-fact answers that imply his actual or feigned indifference. In the fourth stanza, the tempo of action increases, for the woman reports that the soldiers have left the road and apparently have begun to come toward the two speakers. The questions which follow are anxious inquiries about the purpose of the soldiers. Have they stopped for the doctor's care? Have they come to arrest the old parson or the cunning farmer? In stanza seven, the tempo increases even more, for the soldiers have passed the farmyard and have broken into a run. In stanza eight, we find that the man, who previously had been indifferent, must leave, and we assume that he makes his escape. In the ninth stanza, the soldiers have burst into the house in which the man and the woman had been talking.

Such is the simple outline of the action, and thus far the poem is relatively clear. However, when we begin to seek for motives and clarifications, we find a great many enigmas, not all of which are soluble. First, of course, we must ask why the man was apparently indifferent while the woman was apprehensive from the first; after all, it was the man who ultimately had to take flight. Can we assume that his indifference to the soldiers was only feigned in order to allay the apprehension of the woman, or did he only at the last moment realize that he himself was the quarry? Stanza eight presents thorny problems of interpretation. The woman asks if the man has deceived her, but he reaffirms his love even though he must leave. Is he, then, leaving the woman to the dubious mercies of the soldiers, who, in the last stanza, become a most frightening crew ("And their eyes are burning")? Another possibility is this: the woman is the quarry from the beginning; her apprehension reveals this. When the man finally realizes that the woman is indeed the object of the search, he leaves in order to avoid implicating himself.

These are some of the interpretative problems of this exceptionally rich piece of narrative poetry, and perhaps most of the problems are insoluble. We realize, of course, that the poet is under no obligation to make everything perfectly intelligible and rational, for literary effect arises from enigma and paradox (as, for instance, in "The Lady and the Tiger") as well as from resolution and understanding. In "The Quarry" Auden obviously relies upon ambiguity to achieve his purpose.

Thematically, we are on more certain ground in discussing the poem. The soldiers are literally and figuratively representatives of the power of the state, a power which at times is capricious and frequently irresistible. Auden tells us clearly (stanzas six and seven) that the soldiers conceivably could have arrested either the parson (presumably a good man) or the cunning farmer. That is, the poem implies that one never knows where the mailed fist of indiscriminate power will strike. In this sense, the poem talks of the helplessness of the individual as a victim of the state. Very swiftly the poet establishes sympathy for the girl. Her questions, we recognize, are glimmers of hope that she may not be the intended victim, the quarry. In stanza four, we find that she kneels, and in stanza eight she pleads with the man not to break his vows of love and fidelity.

While the first eight stanzas are constructed around the question-answer exchange of the man and woman, in the ninth stanza, another "voice" enters the poem, presumably that of the poet-narrator. No longer does either of the two main characters speak, but rather the provocative conclusion is supplied extrinsically. The conclusion does not, in a narrative sense, conclude; that is, we do not discover who was sought or why. The last two stanzas, however, swiftly characterize the soldiers, heavy booted and with burning eyes. Apparently the troops represent more than disinterested and whimsical power, for their eyes do burn with some kind of emotion, perhaps fanaticism, perhaps hate, perhaps even lust. In any case, the soldiers are not passive.

This poem is a subtle instance of the conscious refinement of the techniques of the traditional ballad. The stanzas are fairly regular ballad stanzas, the use of repetition is obvious, and the poem relies heavily upon implication. But in the traditional ballad, the implication is likely to point rather definitely toward an answer while in Auden's poem, implication tends to be ambiguous--and upon that ambiguity, of course, rests a good deal of the effect of the work. In fact, one of the great dangers in dealing with "The Quarry" might be the tendency to overexplicate. Puzzled by the ambiguity and frustrated by the lack of complete resolution, the student may tend to supply answers that simply can't be predicated on the "facts" of the poem at hand. For instance, though the general outlines of the action are clear, we cannot certainly establish that either the man or the woman is the actual quarry. Nor can we arrive at any convincing explanation of the reason for the search.

Literary form can be and most frequently is based on the arousing and satisfaction of the reader's expectations; most narratives tell not only what happens next, but why. But the form of literature can also attempt to arouse the reader's expectations and achieve effect through leaving those expectations unsatisfied. Such is the case in "The Quarry."

Questions and Activities

Easy

1. In your own words, tell or write the story of "The Quarry." -- For a synopsis, see explication.

2. Who speaks in the poem? -- In the first eight stanzas, the woman asks the questions, and the man answers them. In the ninth stanza, a third speaker enters. See explication.

3. Do we know why the soldiers are coming? -- In a general way, yes. For instance, we suspect very early in the poem that they are on their way to arrest someone, and we soon find out that their quarry is either the man or the woman. We do not, however, know why they want to arrest either. See explication.

4. Do we feel that the soldiers are good or bad? -- The last stanza depicts them as, in some way, representative of the sinister or the evil. See explication.

Medium

5. Can you identify the beginning, the middle, and the end of

the poem? -- We might say that the first three stanzas are the beginning. In them we sense the woman's apprehension and learn that for some reason the soldiers are on the march. The middle might be stanzas four through seven, in which we learn that the soldiers will arrest someone and suspect that they are after either the man or the woman. The conclusion is, of course, stanzas eight and nine, in which the girl is left alone to face the soldiers.

6. In what way is "The Quarry" similar to "The Highwayman"? -- Both deal with lovers who are the objects of a search; in both, the woman is terrorized by soldiers. But in "The Quarry," the lover deserts his beloved, while in "The Highwayman," the lover returns, ultimately to take revenge. In "The Highwayman," we have very clear explanations of the motives for all the actions, but in "The Quarry," we are left to guess. See explication.

7. You have studied several ballads, and by this time, you should be able to identify certain characteristics of the genre. How many of the following techniques can you find in "The Quarry"? In what ways do they add to the effect of the poem?

use of repetition
use of precise details
rhyme and rhythm
impersonal tone

-- The main use of repetition in "The Quarry" is in the question-answer form. This device serves to pose a problem and give a solution, and thereby the action advances. At the same time, we gain a clear picture of both the questioner and the answerer. The student should be able to discover a number of instances of the use of precise detail and should realize that this detail makes the ballad vivid and immediate. The meter of the poem scans in general like this:

/ / / /
O what is that sound which so thrills the ear
/ / / /
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?
/ / /
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,
/ /
The soldiers coming.

Note that the second and fourth lines deviate slightly from the usual ballad meter. The balladeer is free to employ his form as he sees fit, so long as the "music" of the poem is not destroyed. In general, the stanzas in "The Quarry" are very near to ballad form, but, of course (as in the case in many ballads) are rhymed ABAB. The student should note immediately that the point of view of the balladeer is impersonal, as, indeed, it would have to be in a poem which is completely in dialogue. That is, the poet has no chance to interject his personal opinions or feelings in any direct manner.

Difficult

8. What is the woman's attitude? -- See explication. From the very first, she is apprehensive, and her apprehension grows as the poem progresses. The woman's reaction is, of course, one of the enigmas of the ballad. Are we to presume that she senses from the first that the soldiers are seeking her, or is her fear simply a general reaction to the possibility that capricious power might maker her its victim? This we can say with certainty: the effect of the poem resides to a great extent in the swelling crescendo of fear in the woman.

9. What is the man's attitude? -- See explication. Until he makes a hasty escape, his attitude is characterized by either feigned or actual indifference.

10. Look up the meaning of "frustration." Does this word in any way describe your reaction to "The Quarry"? Explain. -- The very nature of this poem is bound to arouse a degree of frustration in the reader, for he is torn between his own natural desire for complete explanations and the poem's lack of those explanations. You might point out that this very frustration is a meaningful element in the poem. If the woman were certain about the soldier's goal, then we might assume that for some reason she was guilty of something. It is the very lack of such explanations that reinforces the theme of helplessness in the face of power, a theme that is one of the really meaningful elements in the poem. To be more specific, the poem has something of the effect of such a work as The Trial, by Franz Kafka. In this novel, the protagonist is brought before the bar of justice, but he never learns the nature of his crime or the specifications of the charge against him. He is simply, and in a great many ways, a victim. We know that the woman is a victim in "The Quarry." We do not know why she is a victim. Is it conceivable that a complete explanation would deprive the poem of meaning rather than add to that meaning?

Lit/I/TV/BkBal

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

A BOOK OF BALLADS

Literature Curriculum I

Teacher Version

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BALLAD SUPPLEMENT

The student version of the ballad book contains the texts of the ballads sung on the tape, except for those which appear in the regular unit on the traditional ballad. The remaining six songs can be used for additional discussion and enjoyment, as the teacher desires. There is no study guide or set of questions for these selections. The brief notes below are designed merely to indicate what in each ballad might most profitably be emphasized during a discussion period.

Some of the students may get interested in some of the technical aspects of the ballad as a literary form. Tape #2 contains a discussion by Barre Toelken, who also sings the first tape, of some of the characteristics of the ballad. He also takes several ballads and traces their development from England to America, showing the variations that occur through oral transmission. The second tape, then, offers excellent opportunities for enrichment for those students or for those classes that wish to pursue the topic further.

1. "Sir Patrick Spens" -- See regular unit.

2. "Johnie Armstrong" --See regular unit.

3. "Jesse James" -- See regular unit.

4. "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife." This ballad exists in many versions in both Scotland and America. The version on the tape is from New York. It is based on the traditional theme of the war between the sexes. After the gore of the first three ballads, the students should enjoy the humor of this one. Discussion could profitably center around the differences between this ballad and previous ones. Here we have a moral plainly stated. The refrain here, as in some of the other ballads on the tape, is primarily filler; it serves no dramatic purpose nor does it advance the story in any way.

5. "Barbry Allen." This is an unusual variant of a ballad with which some of the students will undoubtedly be familiar. Notice that it is sung without accompaniment, as many ballads traditionally are. The television "Hootnanny" version of ballads, with full orchestras and a chorus of singers, is quite non-traditional. The narrator of this version is clearly sweet William himself. The students might want to discuss the pros and cons of this choice of narrator. It gives the whole poem a supernatural aura, which adds to the effect; but at the same time it is rather confusing. One wonders where William is and who he's talking to. Most versions of this ballad are told in the third person. There are several familiar motifs in the ballad that can be profitably discussed. For instance, the flowers growing from the grave and twining in a true-love knot is familiar, as is also the motivating force of the song, the misunderstanding of the lover's actions by the lady. Comparison with the version in Story Poems, p. 50, will be valuable for discussion.

6. "Edward Edward." This ballad in its countless variants is cross-pollinated with "lord Randall" to such an extent that it is impossible to tell which motifs originally belonged to which song. In both we have the killing, with no motivation. In both we have the dialogue between a mother and a son. In both we have the bequest motif. As usual, there is no explanation for the incident. The students should observe the impersonality of the poem, reinforced by the straight dialogue. The ballad moves to a dramatic climax, as we go through the various bequests. There is the surprise answer to the mothers final question, with again no explanation given. But she is obviously involved in some way in Edward's action, and he now repudiates her counsels. This ending is very similar to the O Henry surprise twist technique. Fruitful discussions of narrative structure, climax, and surprise endings can result from a discussion of this ballad.

7. "Babylon," This is an excellent ballad for illustrating incremental repetition. As the robber goes through the same routine with the three girls we tend to be lulled by the repetition, until the break in the pattern emerges with the third sister. This could almost be called an O. Henry ending, as the sudden revelation of identity makes the ballad a tragedy. The students might object to the lack of gumption on the part of the first two girls, or the failure of any of them to recognize their brother. Many of these ballads require what Coleridge called "the willing suspension of disbelief." They should also notice that here while part of the refrain is filler as in the earlier ballad, part of it is integral to the story as providing setting.

8. "Lord Randall" Comparison with the version in the anthology, p.45. will make a good basis for discussion. The students should see that the taped version utilizes some of the bequest motif that appears in "Edward," while this does not appear in the book version. In both versions we have no idea as to why the sweetheart did what she did; and again the dialogue form makes the ballad completely impersonal. In both versions we have the question and answer technique as the form for incremental repetition. Discussion of the variation in the last line of each stanza might be fruitful. In the taped version, Randall is always sick to the heart; but in the book version the refrain moves from "weary with hunting" to "sick to the heart" in the last stanza, a variation that most students should perceive as much more effective.

9. "The Tenderfoot" This is a humorous ballad showing the uninitiated tenderfoot. Those students who have read "The Genuine Mexican Plug" that appears in the Seventh Grade Orientation Unit will be able to see the similarity of theme in the two works. The tenderfoot is taken advantage of by the initiated, and subjected to a form of "hazing." The students might enjoy knowing that this ballad was composed by cowboys, not by a tenderfoot, and is a commentary by a professional on the lack of understanding of his job exhibited by laymen and those who have a romantic view of the cowpuncher's life. This should lead to discussion of the concept of point of view. If they are asked who wrote the poem, a good case could be made for either a tenderfoot or a cowboy.